









THE COLLECTED POETICAL WORKS  
OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

VOL. IV

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE : THE  
TALE OF BALEN : ATALANTA  
IN CALYDON : ERECHTHEUS

## SWINBURNE'S POETICAL WORKS

- I. POEMS AND BALLADS (First Series).
- II. SONGS BEFORE SUNRISE, and SONGS OF  
TWO NATIONS.
- III. POEMS AND BALLADS (Second and Third  
Series), and SONGS OF THE SPRING-  
TIDES.
- IV. TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE, THE TALE OF  
BALEN, ATALANTA IN CALYDON,  
ERECHTHEUS.
- V. STUDIES IN SONG, A CENTURY OF  
ROUNDELS, SONNETS ON ENGLISH  
DRAMATIC POETS, THE HEPTALOGIA,  
ETC.
- VI. A MIDSUMMER HOLIDAY, ASTROPHEL,  
A CHANNEL PASSAGE AND OTHER  
POEMS.

---

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE  
THE TALE OF BALEN  
ATALANTA IN CALYDON  
ERECHTHEUS

By

Algernon Charles Swinburne



---

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

*First printed (Chatto), 1904  
Reprinted 1904, '09, '10, '12  
(Heinemann), 1917, 1920*

# CONTENTS

## TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

	PAGE
PRELUDE : TRISTRAM AND ISEULT . . . . .	5
I. THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW . . . . .	13
II. THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE. . . . .	39
III. TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY . . . . .	54
IV. THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE . . . . .	68
V. ISEULT AT TINTAGEL . . . . .	76
VI. JOYOUS GARD . . . . .	87
VII. THE WIFE'S VIGIL . . . . .	104
VIII. THE LAST PILGRIMAGE . . . . .	112
IX. THE SAILING OF THE SWAN. . . . .	133
THE TALE OF BALEN . . . . .	153
ATALANTA IN CALYDON . . . . .	235
ERECHTHEUS . . . . .	335



# TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE



TO MY BEST FRIEND

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON



*Spring speaks again, and all our woods are stirred,  
And all our wide glad wastes aflower around,  
That twice have heard keen April's clarion sound  
Since here we first together saw and heard  
Spring's light reverberate and reiterate word  
Shine forth and speak in season. Life stands crowned  
Here with the best one thing it ever found,  
As of my soul's best birthdays dawns the third.*

*There is a friend that as the wise man saith  
Cleaves closer than a brother : nor to me  
Hath time not shown, through days like waves at strife,  
This truth more sure than all things else but death,  
This pearl most perfect found in all the sea  
That washes toward your feet these waifs of life.*

THE PINES : *April 1882*



## PRELUDE

### TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

LOVE, that is first and last of all things made,  
The light that has the living world for shade,  
The spirit that for temporal veil has on  
The souls of all men woven in unison,  
One fiery raiment with all lives inwrought  
And lights of sunny and starry deed and thought,  
And alway through new act and passion new  
Shines the divine same body and beauty through,  
The body spiritual of fire and light  
That is to worldly noon as noon to night ;  
Love, that is flesh upon the spirit of man  
And spirit within the flesh whence breath began ;  
Love, that keeps all the choir of lives in chime ;  
Love, that is blood within the veins of time ;  
That wrought the whole world without stroke of hand,  
Shaping the breadth of sea, the length of land,  
And with the pulse and motion of his breath  
Through the great heart of the earth strikes life and  
death,  
The sweet twain chords that make the sweet tune live  
Through day and night of things alternative,  
Through silence and through sound of stress and  
strife,  
And ebb and flow of dying death and life ;

Love, that sounds loud or light in all men's ears,  
Whence all men's eyes take fire from sparks of tears,  
That binds on all men's feet or chains or wings ;  
Love, that is root and fruit of terrene things ;  
Love, that the whole world's waters shall not drown,  
The whole world's fiery forces not burn down ;  
Love, that what time his own hands guard his head  
The whole world's wrath and strength shall not strike  
dead ;

Love, that if once his own hands make his grave  
The whole world's pity and sorrow shall not save ;  
Love, that for very life shall not be sold,  
Nor bought nor bound with iron nor with gold ;  
So strong that heaven, could love bid heaven farewell,  
Would turn to fruitless and unflowering hell ;  
So sweet that hell, to hell could love be given,  
Would turn to splendid and sonorous heaven ;  
Love that is fire within thee and light above,  
And lives by grace of nothing but of love ;  
Through many and lovely thoughts and much desire  
Led these twain to the life of tears and fire ;  
Through many and lovely days and much delight  
Led these twain to the lifeless life of night.

Yea, but what then ? albeit all this were thus,  
And soul smote soul and left it ruinous,  
And love led love as eyeless men lead men,  
Through chance by chance to deathward—Ah, what  
then ?

Hath love not likewise led them further yet,  
Out through the years where memories rise and set,  
Some large as suns, some moon-like warm and pale,  
Some starry-sighted, some through clouds that sail  
Seen as red flame through spectral float of fume,  
Each with the blush of its own special bloom

On the fair face of its own coloured light,  
Distinguishable in all the host of night,  
Divisible from all the radiant rest  
And separable in splendour? Hath the best  
Light of love's all, of all that burn and move,  
A better heaven than heaven is? Hath not love  
Made for all these their sweet particular air  
To shine in, their own beams and names to bear,  
Their ways to wander and their wards to keep,  
Till story and song and glory and all things sleep?  
Hath he not plucked from death of lovers dead  
Their musical soft memories, and kept red  
The rose of their remembrance in men's eyes,  
The sunsets of their stories in his skies,  
The blush of their dead blood in lips that speak  
Of their dead lives, and in the listener's cheek  
That trembles with the kindling pity lit  
In gracious hearts for some sweet fever-fit,  
A fiery pity enkindled of pure thought  
By tales that make their honey out of nought,  
The faithless faith that lives without belief  
Its light life through, the griefless ghost of grief?  
Yea, as warm night refashions the sere blood  
In storm-struck petal or in sun-struck bud,  
With tender hours and tempering dew to cure  
The hunger and thirst of day's distemperature  
And ravin of the dry discolouring hours,  
Hath he not bid relume their flameless flowers  
With summer fire and heat of lamping song,  
And bid the short-lived things, long dead, live long,  
And thought remake their wan funereal fames,  
And the sweet shining signs of women's names  
That mark the months out and the weeks anew  
He moves in changeless change of seasons through

To fill the days up of his dateless year  
Flame from Queen Helen to Queen Guenevere ?  
For first of all the sphery signs whereby  
Love severs light from darkness, and most high,  
In the white front of January there glows  
The rose-red sign of Helen like a rose :  
And gold-eyed as the shore-flower shelterless  
Whereon the sharp-breathed sea blows bitterness,  
A storm-star that the seafarers of love  
Strain their wind-wearied eyes for glimpses of,  
Shoots keen through February's grey frost and damp  
The lamplike star of Hero for a lamp ;  
The star that Marlowe sang into our skies  
With mouth of gold, and morning in his eyes ;  
And in clear March across the rough blue sea  
The signal sapphire of Alcyone  
Makes bright the blown brows of the wind-foot year ;  
And shining like a sunbeam-smitten tear  
Full ere it fall, the fair next sign in sight  
Burns opal-wise with April-coloured light  
When air is quick with song and rain and flame,  
My birth-month star that in love's heaven hath name  
Iseult, a light of blossom and beam and shower,  
My singing sign that makes the song-tree flower ;  
Next like a pale and burning pearl beyond  
The rose-white sphere of flower-named Rosamond  
Signs the sweet head of Maytime ; and for June  
Flares like an angered and storm-reddening moon  
Her signal sphere, whose Carthaginian pyre  
Shadowed her traitor's flying sail with fire ;  
Next, glittering as the wine-bright jacinth-stone,  
A star south-risen that first to music shone,  
The keen girl-star of golden Juliet bears  
Light northward to the month whose forehead wears

Her name for flower upon it, and his trees  
Mix their deep English song with Veronese ;  
And like an awful sovereign chrysolite  
Burning, the supreme fire that blinds the night,  
The hot gold head of Venus kissed by Mars,  
A sun-flower among small spher'd flowers of stars,  
The light of Cleopatra fills and burns  
The hollow of heaven whence ardent August yearns ;  
And fixed and shining as the sister-shed  
Sweet tears for Phaethon disorbed and dead,  
The pale bright autumn's amber-coloured sphere,  
That through September sees the saddening year  
As love sees change through sorrow, hath to name  
Francesca's ; and the star that watches flame  
The embers of the harvest overgone  
Is Thisbe's, slain of love in Babylon,  
Set in the golden girdle of sweet signs  
A blood-bright ruby ; last save one light shines  
An eastern wonder of sphery chrysopras,  
The star that made men mad, Angelica's ;  
And latest named and lordliest, with a sound  
Of swords and harps in heaven that ring it round,  
Last love-light and last love-song of the year's,  
Gleams like a glorious emerald Guenevere's.  
These are the signs wherethrough the year sees  
move,  
Full of the sun, the sun-god which is love,  
A fiery body blood-red from the heart  
Outward, with fire-white wings made wide apart,  
That close not and unclose not, but upright  
Steered without wind by their own light and might  
Sweep through the flameless fire of air that rings  
From heaven to heaven with thunder of wheels and  
wings

And antiphones of motion-moulded rhyme  
Through spaces out of space and timeless time.

So shine above dead chance and conquered change  
The spherèd signs, and leave without their range  
Doubt and desire, and hope with fear for wife,  
Pale pains, and pleasures long worn out of life.  
Yea, even the shadows of them spiritless,  
Through the dim door of sleep that seem to press,  
Forms without form, a piteous people and blind,  
Men and no men, whose lamentable kind  
The shadow of death and shadow of life compel  
Through semblances of heaven and false-faced hell,  
Through dreams of light and dreams of darkness tost  
On waves innavigable, are these so lost ?  
Shapes that wax pale and shift in swift strange wise,  
Void faces with unspeculative eyes,  
Dim things that gaze and glare, dead mouths that  
move,  
Featureless heads discrowned of hate and love,  
Mockeries and masks of motion and mute breath,  
Leavings of life, the superflux of death—  
If these things and no more than these things be  
Left when man ends or changes, who can see ?  
Or who can say with what more subtle sense  
Their subtler natures taste in air less dense  
A life less thick and palpable than ours,  
Warmed with faint fires and sweetened with dead  
flowers

And measured by low music ? how time fares  
In that wan time-forgotten world of theirs,  
Their pale poor world too deep for sun or star  
To live in, where the eyes of Helen are,  
And hers who made as God's own eyes to shine  
The eyes that met them of the Florentine,

Wherein the godhead thence transfigured lit  
All time for all men with the shadow of it?  
Ah, and these too felt on them as God's grace  
The pity and glory of this man's breathing face ;  
For these too, these my lovers, these my twain,  
Saw Dante, saw God visible by pain,  
With lips that thundered and with feet that trod  
Before men's eyes incognisable God ;  
Saw love and wrath and light and night and fire  
Live with one life and at one mouth respire,  
And in one golden sound their whole soul heard  
Sounding, one sweet immitigable word.

They have the night, who had like us the day ;  
We, whom day binds, shall have the night as they.  
We, from the fetters of the light unbound,  
Healed of our wound of living, shall sleep sound.  
All gifts but one the jealous God may keep  
From our soul's longing, one he cannot—sleep.  
This, though he grudge all other grace to prayer,  
This grace his closed hand cannot choose but spare.  
This, though his ear be sealed to all that live,  
Be it lightly given or lothly, God must give.  
We, as the men whose name on earth is none,  
We too shall surely pass out of the sun ;  
Out of the sound and eyeless light of things,  
Wide as the stretch of life's time-wandering wings,  
Wide as the naked world and shadowless,  
And long-lived as the world's own weariness.  
Us too, when all the fires of time are cold,  
The heights shall hide us and the depths shall hold.  
Us too, when all the tears of time are dry,  
The night shall lighten from her tearless eye.  
Blind is the day and eyeless all its light,  
But the large unbewildered eye of night

Hath sense and speculation ; and the sheer  
Limitless length of lifeless life and clear,  
The timeless space wherein the brief worlds move  
Clothed with light life and fruitful with light love,  
With hopes that threaten, and with fears that cease,  
Past fear and hope, hath in it only peace.

Yet of these lives inlaid with hopes and fears,  
Spun fine as fire and jewelled thick with tears,  
These lives made out of loves that long since were,  
Lives wrought as ours of earth and burning air,  
Fugitive flame, and water of secret springs,  
And clothed with joys and sorrows as with wings,  
Some yet are good, if aught be good, to save  
Some while from washing wreck and wrecking wave.  
Was such not theirs, the twain I take, and give  
Out of my life to make their dead life live  
Some days of mine, and blow my living breath  
Between dead lips forgotten even of death ?  
So many and many of old have given my twain  
Love and live song and honey-hearted pain,  
Whose root is sweetness and whose fruit is sweet,  
So many and with such joy have tracked their feet,  
What should I do to follow ? yet I too,  
I have the heart to follow, many or few  
Be the feet gone before me ; for the way,  
Rose-red with remnant roses of the day  
Westward, and eastward white with stars that break,  
Between the green and foam is fair to take  
For any sail the sea-wind steers for me  
From morning into morning, sea to sea.

## I

## THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

ABOUT the middle music of the spring  
Came from the castled shore of Ireland's king  
A fair ship stoutly sailing, eastward bound  
And south by Wales and all its wonders round  
To the loud rocks and ringing reaches home  
That take the wild wrath of the Cornish foam,  
Past Lyonesse unswallowed of the tides  
And high Carlion that now the steep sea hides  
To the wind-hollowed heights and gusty bays  
Of sheer Tintagel, fair with famous days.  
Above the stem a gilded swallow shone,  
Wrought with straight wings and eyes of glittering  
stone  
As flying sunward oversea, to bear  
Green summer with it through the singing air.  
And on the deck between the rowers at dawn,  
As the bright sail with brightening wind was drawn,  
Sat with full face against the strengthening light  
Iseult, more fair than foam or dawn was white.  
Her gaze was glad past love's own singing of,  
And her face lovely past desire of love.  
Past thought and speech her maiden motions were,  
And a more golden sunrise was her hair.

The very veil of her bright flesh was made  
As of light woven and moonbeam-coloured shade  
More fine than moonbeams ; white her eyelids shone  
As snow sun-stricken that endures the sun,  
And through their curled and coloured clouds of deep  
Luminous lashes thick as dreams in sleep  
Shone as the sea's depth swallowing up the sky's  
The springs of unimaginable eyes.  
As the wave's subtler emerald is pierced through  
With the utmost heaven's inextricable blue,  
And both are woven and molten in one sleight  
Of amorous colour and implicated light  
Under the golden guard and gaze of noon,  
So glowed their awless amorous plenilune,  
Azure and gold and ardent grey, made strange  
With fiery difference and deep interchange  
Inexplicable of glories multiform ;  
Now as the sullen sapphire swells toward storm  
Foamless, their bitter beauty grew acold,  
And now afire with ardour of fine gold.  
Her flower-soft lips were meek and passionate,  
For love upon them like a shadow sate  
Patient, a foreseen vision of sweet things,  
A dream with eyes fast shut and plumeless wings  
That knew not what man's love or life should be,  
Nor had it sight nor heart to hope or see  
What thing should come, but childlike satisfied  
Watched out its virgin vigil in soft pride  
And unkissed expectation ; and the glad  
Clear cheeks and throat and tender temples had  
Such maiden heat as if a rose's blood  
Beat in the live heart of a lily-bud.  
Between the small round breasts a white way led  
Heavenward, and from slight foot to slender head

The whole fair body flower-like swayed and shone  
Moving, and what her light hand leant upon  
Grew blossom-scented : her warm arms began  
To round and ripen for delight of man  
That they should clasp and circle : her fresh hands,  
Like regent lilies of reflowering lands  
Whose vassal firstlings, crown and star and plume,  
Bow down to the empire of that sovereign bloom,  
Shone sceptreless, and from her face there went  
A silent light as of a God content ;  
Save when, more swift and keen than love or shame,  
Some flash of blood, light as the laugh of flame,  
Broke it with sudden beam and shining speech,  
As dream by dream shot through her eyes, and each  
Outshone the last that lightened, and not one  
Showed her such things as should be borne and  
done.

Though hard against her shone the sunlike face  
That in all change and wreck of time and place  
Should be the star of her sweet living soul.  
Nor had love made it as his written scroll  
For evil will and good to read in yet ;  
But smooth and mighty, without scar or fret,  
Fresh and high-lifted was the helmless brow  
As the oak-tree flower that tops the topmost bough,  
Ere it drop off before the perfect leaf ;  
And nothing save his name he had of grief,  
The name his mother, dying as he was born,  
Made out of sorrow in very sorrow's scorn,  
And set it on him smiling in her sight,  
Tristram ; who now, clothed with sweet youth and  
might,  
As a glad witness wore that bitter name,  
The second symbol of the world for fame.

Famous and full of fortune was his youth  
Ere the beard's bloom had left his cheek unsmooth,  
And in his face a lordship of strong joy  
And height of heart no chance could curb or cloy  
Lightened, and all that warmed them at his eyes  
Loved them as larks that kindle as they rise  
Toward light they turn to music love the blue strong  
skies.

So like the morning through the morning moved  
Tristram, a light to look on and be loved.  
Song sprang between his lips and hands, and shone  
Singing, and strengthened and sank down thereon  
As a bird settles to the second flight,  
Then from beneath his harping hands with might  
Leapt, and made way and had its fill and died,  
And all whose hearts were fed upon it sighed  
Silent, and in them all the fire of tears  
Burned as wine drunken not with lips but ears.  
And gazing on his fervent hands that made  
The might of music all their souls obeyed  
With trembling strong subservience of delight,  
Full many a maid that had him once in sight  
Thought in the secret rapture of her heart  
In how dark onset had these hands borne part  
How oft, and were so young and sweet of skill ;  
And those red lips whereon the song burned still,  
What words and cries of battle had they flung  
Athwart the swing and shriek of swords, so young ;  
And eyes as glad as summer, what strange youth  
Fed them so full of happy heart and truth,  
That had seen sway from side to sundering side  
The steel flow of that terrible springtide  
That the moon rules not, but the fire and light  
Of men's hearts mixed in the mid mirth of fight.

Therefore the joy and love of him they had  
Made thought more amorous in them and more  
glad  
For his fame's sake remembered, and his youth  
Gave his fame flowerlike fragrance and soft growth  
As of a rose requickening, when he stood  
Fair in their eye, a flower of faultless blood.  
And that sad queen to whom his life was death,  
A rose plucked forth of summer in mid breath,  
A star fall'n out of season in mid throe  
Of that life's joy that makes the star's life glow,  
Made their love sadder toward him and more strong.  
And in mid change of time and fight and song  
Chance cast him westward on the low sweet strand  
Where songs are sung of the old green Irish land,  
And the sky loves it, and the sea loves best,  
And as a bird is taken to man's breast  
The sweet-souled land where sorrow sweetest sings  
Is wrapt round with them as with hands and wings  
And taken to the sea's heart as a flower.  
There in the luck and light of his good hour  
Came to the king's court like a noteless man  
Tristram, and while some half a season ran  
Abode before him harping in his hall,  
And taught sweet craft of new things musical  
To the dear maiden mouth and innocent hands  
That for his sake are famous in all lands.  
Yet was not love between them, for their fate  
Lay wrapt in its appointed hour at wait,  
And had no flower to show yet, and no sting.  
But once being vexed with some past wound the  
king  
Bade give him comfort of sweet baths, and then  
Should Iseult watch him as his handmaiden,

For his more honour in men's sight, and ease  
The hurts he had with holy remedies  
Made by her mother's magic in strange hours  
Out of live roots and life-compelling flowers.  
And finding by the wound's shape in his side  
This was the knight by whom their strength had died  
And all their might in one man overthrown  
Had left their shame in sight of all men shown,  
She would have slain him swordless with his sword ;  
Yet seemed he to her so great and fair a lord  
She heaved up hand and smote not ; then said he,  
Laughing—‘ What comfort shall this dead man be,  
Damsel ? what hurt is for my blood to heal ?  
But set your hand not near the toothèd steel  
Lest the fang strike it.’—‘ Yea, the fang,’ she said,  
‘ Should it not sting the very serpent dead  
That stung mine uncle ? for his slayer art thou,  
And half my mother's heart is bloodless now  
Through thee, that mad'st the veins of all her kin  
Bleed in his wounds whose veins through thee ran  
thin.’

Yet thought she how their hot chief's violent heart  
Had flung the fierce word forth upon their part  
Which bade to battle the best knight that stood  
On Arthur's, and so dying of his wild mood  
Had set upon his conqueror's flesh the seal  
Of his mishallowed and anointed steel,  
Whereof the venom and enchanted might  
Made the sign burn here branded in her sight.  
These things she stood recasting, and her soul  
Subsiding till its wound of wrath were whole  
Grew smooth again, as thought still softening stole  
Through all its tempered passion ; nor might hate  
Keep high the fire against him lit of late ;

But softly from his smiling sight she passed.  
And peace thereafter made between them fast  
Made peace between two kingdoms, when he went  
Home with hands reconciled and heart content,  
To bring fair truce 'twixt Cornwall's wild bright  
strand

And the long wrangling wars of that loud land.  
And when full peace was struck betwixt them twain  
Forth must he fare by those green straits again,  
And bring back Iseult for a plighted bride  
And set to reign at Mark his uncle's side.

So now with feast made and all triumphs done  
They sailed between the moonfall and the sun  
Under the spent stars eastward ; but the queen  
Out of wise heart and subtle love had seen  
Such things as might be, dark as in a glass,  
And lest some doom of these should come to pass  
Bethought her with her secret soul alone  
To work some charm for marriage unison  
And strike the heart of Iseult to her lord  
With power compulsive more than stroke of sword.  
Therefore with marvellous herbs and spells she  
wrought

To win the very wonder of her thought,  
And brewed it with her secret hands and blest  
And drew and gave out of her secret breast  
To one her chosen and Iseult's handmaiden,  
Brangwain, and bade her hide from sight of men  
This marvel covered in a golden cup,  
So covering in her heart the counsel up  
As in the gold the wondrous wine lay close ;  
And when the last shout with the last cup rose  
About the bride and bridegroom bound to bed,  
Then should this one word of her will be said

To her new-married maiden child, that she  
 Should drink with Mark this draught in unity,  
 And no lip touch it for her sake but theirs :  
 For with long love and consecrating prayers  
 The wine was hallowed for their mouths to pledge ;  
 And if a drop fell from the beaker's edge  
 That drop should Iseult hold as dear as blood  
 Shed from her mother's heart to do her good.  
 And having drunk they twain should be one heart  
 Who were one flesh till fleshly death should part—  
 Death, who parts all. So Brangwain swore, and  
 kept

The hid thing by her while she waked or slept.  
 And now they sat to see the sun again  
 Whose light of eye had looked on no such twain  
 Since Galahault in the rose-time of the year  
 Brought Launcelot first to sight of Guenevere.

And Tristram caught her changing eyes and said :  
 “ As this day raises daylight from the dead  
 Might not this face the life of a dead man ? ”

And Iseult, gazing where the sea was wan  
 Out of the sun’s way, said : “ I pray you not  
 Praise me, but tell me there in Camelot,  
 Saving the queen, who hath most name of fair ?  
 I would I were a man and dwelling there,  
 That I might win me better praise than yours,  
 Even such as you have ; for your praise endures,  
 That with great deeds ye wring from mouths of  
 men,

But ours—for shame, where is it ? Tell me then,  
 Since woman may not wear a better here,  
 Who of this praise hath most save Guenevere ? ”

And Tristram, lightening with a laugh held in—  
 “ Surely a little praise is this to win,

A poor praise and a little ! but of these  
Hapless, whom love serves only with bowed  
knees,

Of such poor women fairer face hath none  
That lifts her eyes alive against the sun  
Than Arthur's sister, whom the north seas call  
Mistress of isles ; so yet majestical  
Above the crowns on younger heads she moves,  
Outlightening with her eyes our late-born loves."

"Ah," said Iseult, "is she more tall than I ?  
Look, I am tall ; " and struck the mast hard by,  
With utmost upward reach of her bright hand ;  
" And look, fair lord, now, when I rise and stand,  
How high with feet unlifted I can touch  
Standing straight up ; could this queen do thus  
much ?

Nay, over tall she must be then, like me ;  
Less fair than lesser women. May this be,  
That still she stands the second stateliest there,  
So more than many so much younger fair,  
She, born when yet the king your lord was not,  
And has the third knight after Launcelot  
And after you to serve her ? nay, sir, then  
God made her for a godlike sign to men."

"Ay," Tristram answered, "for a sign, a sign—  
Would God it were not ! for no planets shine  
With half such fearful forecast of men's fate  
As a fair face so more unfortunate."

Then with a smile that lit not on her brows  
But moved upon her red mouth tremulous  
Light as a sea-bird's motion oversea,  
"Yea," quoth Iseult, "the happier hap for me,  
With no such face to bring men no such fate.  
Yet her might all we women born too late

Praise for good hap, who so enskied above  
Not more in age excels us than man's love."

There came a glooming light on Tristram's face  
Answering : " God keep you better in his grace  
Than to sit down beside her in men's sight.  
For if men be not blind whom God gives light  
And lie not in whose lips he bids truth live,  
Great grief shall she be given, and greater give.  
For Merlin witnessed of her years ago  
That she should work woe and should suffer woe  
Beyond the race of women : and in truth  
Her face, a spell that knows nor age nor youth,  
Like youth being soft, and subtler-eyed than age,  
With lips that mock the doom her eyes presage,  
Hath on it such a light of cloud and fire,  
With charm and change of keen or dim desire,  
And over all a fearless look of fear  
Hung like a veil across its changing cheer,  
Made up of fierce foreknowledge and sharp scorn,  
That it were better she had not been born.  
For not love's self can help a face which hath  
Such insubmissive anguish of wan wrath,  
Blind prescience and self-contemptuous hate  
Of her own soul and heavy-footed fate,  
Writ broad upon its beauty : none the less  
Its fire of bright and burning bitterness  
Takes with as quick a flame the sense of men  
As any sunbeam, nor is quenched again  
With any drop of dewfall ; yea, I think  
No herb of force or blood-compelling drink  
Would heal a heart that ever it made hot.  
Ay, and men too that greatly love her not,  
Seeing the great love of her and Lamoracke,  
Make no great marvel, nor look strangely back

When with his gaze about her she goes by  
Pale as a breathless and star-quicken<sup>g</sup> sky  
Between moonrise and sunset, and moves out  
Clothed with the passion of his eyes about  
As night with all her stars, yet night is black ;  
And she, clothed warm with love of Lamoracke,  
Girt with his worship as with girdling gold,  
Seems all at heart anhungered and acold,  
Seems sad at heart and loveless of the light,  
As night, star-clothed or naked, is but night."

And with her sweet eyes sunken, and the mirth  
Dead in their look as earth lies dead in earth  
That reigned on earth and triumphed, Iseult said :  
" Is it her shame of something done and dead  
Or fear of something to be born and done  
That so in her soul's eye puts out the sun ? "

And Tristram answered : " Surely, as I think,  
This gives her soul such bitterness to drink,  
The sin born blind, the sightless sin unknown,  
Wrought when the summer in her blood was blown  
But scarce aflower, and spring first flushed her will  
With bloom of dreams no fruitage should fulfil,  
When out of vision and desire was wrought  
The sudden sin that from the living thought  
Leaps a live deed and dies not : then there came  
On that blind sin swift eyesight like a flame  
Touching the dark to death, and made her mad  
With helpless knowledge that too late forbade  
What was before the bidding : and she knew  
How sore a life dead love should lead her through  
To what sure end how fearful ; and though yet  
Nor with her blood nor tears her way be wet  
And she look bravely with set face on fate,  
Yet she knows well the serpent hour at wait

Somewhere to sting and spare not ; ay, and he,  
Arthur"—

"The king," quoth Iseult suddenly,  
"Doth the king too live so in sight of fear ?  
They say sin touches not a man so near  
As shame a woman ; yet he too should be  
Part of the penance, being more deep than she  
Set in the sin."

"Nay," Tristram said, "for thus  
It fell by wicked hap and hazardous,  
That wittingly he sinned no more than youth  
May sin and be assoiled of God and truth,  
Repenting ; since in his first year of reign  
As he stood splendid with his foemen slain  
And light of new-blown battles, flushed and hot  
With hope and life, came greeting from King Lot  
Out of his wind-worn islands oversea,  
And homage to my king and fealty  
Of those north seas wherein the strange shapes swim,  
As from his man ; and Arthur greeted him  
As his good lord and courteously, and bade  
To his high feast ; who coming with him had  
This Queen Morgause of Orkney, his fair wife,  
In the green middle Maytime of her life,  
And scarce in April was our king's as then,  
And goodliest was he of all flowering men,  
And of what graft as yet himself knew not ;  
But cold as rains in autumn was King Lot  
And grey-grown out of season : so there sprang  
Swift love between them, and all spring through sang  
Light in their joyous hearing ; for none knew  
The bitter bond of blood between them two,  
Twain fathers but one mother, till too late  
The sacred mouth of Merlin set forth fate

And brake the secret seal on Arthur's birth,  
And showed his ruin and his rule on earth  
Inextricable, and light on lives to be.  
For surely, though time slay us, yet shall we  
Have such high name and lordship of good days  
As shall sustain us living, and men's praise  
Shall burn a beacon lit above us dead.  
And of the king how shall not this be said  
When any of us from any mouth has praise,  
That such were men in only this king's days,  
In Arthur's? yea, come shine or shade, no less  
His name shall be one name with knightliness,  
His fame one light with sunlight. Yet in sooth  
His age shall bear the burdens of his youth  
And bleed from his own bloodshed ; for indeed  
Blind to him blind his sister brought forth seed,  
And of the child between them shall be born  
Destruction : so shall God not suffer scorn,  
Nor in men's souls and lives his law lie dead."

And as one moved and marvelling Iseult said :  
"Great pity it is and strange it seems to me  
God could not do them so much right as we,  
Who slay not men for witless evil done ;  
And these the noblest under God's glad sun  
For sin they knew not he that knew shall slay,  
And smite blind men for stumbling in fair day.  
What good is it to God that such should die ?  
Shall the sun's light grow sunnier in the sky  
Because their light of spirit is clean put out ?"

And sighing, she looked from wave to cloud about,  
And even with that the full-grown feet of day  
Sprang upright on the quivering water-way,  
And his face burned against her meeting face  
Most like a lover's thrilled with great love's grace

Whose glance takes fire and gives ; the quick sea  
shone

And shivered like spread wings of angels blown  
By the sun's breath before him ; and a low  
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow  
As into rainfall of sea-roses shed

Leaf by wild leaf on that green garden-bed  
Which tempests till and sea-winds turn and plough:  
For rosy and fiery round the running prow  
Fluttered the flocks and feathers of the spray,  
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away  
To waste on the ardent water ; swift the moon  
Withered to westward as a face in swoon  
Death-stricken by glad tidings : and the height  
Throbbed and the centre quivered with delight  
And the depth quailed with passion as of love,  
Till like the heart of some new-mated dove  
Air, light, and wave seemed full of burning rest,  
With motion as of one God's beating breast.

And her heart sprang in Iseult, and she drew  
With all her spirit and life the sunrise through,  
And through her lips the keen triumphant air  
Sea-scented, sweeter than land-roses were,  
And through her eyes the whole rejoicing east  
Sun-satisfied, and all the heaven at feast  
Spread for the morning ; and the imperious mirth  
Of wind and light that moved upon the earth,  
Making the spring, and all the fruitful might  
And strong regeneration of delight  
That swells the seedling leaf and sapling man,  
Since the first life in the first world began  
To burn and burgeon through void limbs and veins,  
And the first love with sharp sweet procreant pains

To pierce and bring forth roses ; yea, she felt  
Through her own soul the sovereign morning melt,  
And all the sacred passion of the sun ;  
And as the young clouds flamed and were undone  
About him coming, touched and burnt away  
In rosy ruin and yellow spoil of day,  
The sweet veil of her body and corporal sense  
Felt the dawn also cleave it, and incense  
With light from inward and with effluent heat  
The kindling soul through fleshly hands and feet.  
And as the august great blossom of the dawn  
Burst, and the full sun scarce from sea withdrawn  
Seemed on the fiery water a flower afloat,  
So as a fire the mighty morning smote  
Throughout her, and incensed with the influent hour  
Her whole soul's one great mystical red flower  
Burst, and the bud of her sweet spirit broke  
Rose-fashion, and the strong spring at a stroke  
Thrilled, and was cloven, and from the full sheath  
came

The whole rose of the woman red as flame :  
And all her Mayday blood as from a swoon  
Flushed, and May rose up in her and was June.  
So for a space her heart as heavenward burned :  
Then with half summer in her eyes she turned,  
And on her lips was April yet, and smiled,  
As though the spirit and sense unreconciled  
Shrank laughing back, and would not ere its hour  
Let life put forth the irrevocable flower.

And the soft speech between them grew again  
With questionings and records of what men  
Rose mightiest, and what names for love or fight  
Shone starriest overhead of queen or knight.

There Tristram spake of many a noble thing,  
High feast and storm of tourney round the king,  
Strange quest by perilous lands of marsh and brake  
And circling woods branch-knotted like a snake  
And places pale with sins that they had seen,  
Where was no life of red fruit or of green  
But all was as a dead face wan and dun ;  
And bowers of evil builders whence the sun  
Turns silent, and the moon holds hardly light  
Above them through the sick and star-crossed night ;  
And of their hands through whom such holds lay  
waste,  
And all their strengths dishevelled and defaced  
Fell ruinous, and were not from north to south :  
And of the might of Merlin's ancient mouth,  
The son of no man's loins, begot by doom  
In speechless sleep out of a spotless womb ;  
For sleeping among graves where none had rest  
And ominous houses of dead bones unblest  
Among the grey grass rough as old rent hair  
And wicked herbage whitening like despair  
And blown upon with blasts of dolorous breath  
From gaunt rare gaps and hollow doors of death,  
A maid unspotted, senseless of the spell,  
Felt not about her breathe some thing of hell  
Whose child and hers was Merlin ; and to him  
Great light from God gave sight of all things dim  
And wisdom of all wondrous things, to say  
What root should bear what fruit of night or day,  
And sovereign speech and counsel higher than man ;  
Wherefore his youth like age was wise and wan,  
And his age sorrowful and fain to sleep ;  
Yet should sleep never, neither laugh nor weep,

Till in some depth of deep sweet land or sea  
The heavenly hands of holier Nimue,  
That was the nurse of Launcelot, and most sweet  
Of all that move with magical soft feet  
Among us, being of lovelier blood and breath,  
Should shut him in with sleep as kind as death :  
For she could pass between the quick and dead :  
And of her love toward Pelleas, for whose head  
Love-wounded and world-wearied she had won  
A place beyond all pain in Avalon ;  
And of the fire that wasted afterward  
The loveless eyes and bosom of Ettarde,  
In whose false love his faultless heart had burned ;  
And now being rapt from her, her lost heart  
yearned  
To seek him, and passed hungering out of life :  
And after all the thunder-hours of strife  
That roared between King Claudas and King Ban  
How Nimue's mighty nursling waxed to man,  
And how from his first field such grace he got  
That all men's hearts bowed down to Launcelot,  
And how the high prince Galahault held him dear  
And led him even to love of Guenevere  
And to that kiss which made break forth as fire  
The laugh that was the flower of his desire,  
The laugh that lightened at her lips for bliss  
To win from Love so great a lover's kiss :  
And of the toil of Balen all his days  
To reap but thorns for fruit and tears for praise,  
Whose hap was evil as his heart was good,  
And all his works and ways by wold and wood  
Led through much pain to one last labouring day  
When blood for tears washed grief with life away :

And of the kin of Arthur, and their might ;  
 The misborn head of Mordred, sad as night,  
 With cold waste cheeks and eyes as keen as pain,  
 And the close angry lips of Agravaine ;  
 And gracious Gawain, scattering words as flowers,  
 The kindliest head of worldly paramours ;  
 And the fair hand of Gareth, found in fight  
 Strong as a sea-beast's tushes and as white ;  
 And of the king's self, glorious yet and glad  
 For all the toil and doubt of doom he had,  
 Clothed with men's loves and full of kingly days.

Then Iseult said : " Let each knight have his praise  
 And each good man good witness of his worth ;  
 But when men laud the second name on earth,  
 Whom would they praise to have no worldly peer  
 Save him whose love makes glorious Guenevere ? "

" Nay," Tristram said, " such man as he is none."

" What," said she, " there is none such under sun  
 Of all the large earth's living ? yet I deemed  
 Men spake of one—but maybe men that dreamed,  
 Fools and tongue-stricken, witless, babbler's breed—  
 That for all high things was his peer indeed  
 Save this one highest, to be so loved and love."

And Tristram : " Little wit had these thereof ;  
 For there is none such in the world as this."

" Ay, upon land," quoth Iseult, " none such is,  
 I doubt not, nor where fighting folk may be ;  
 But were there none such between sky and sea,  
 The world's whole worth were poorer than I wist."

And Tristram took her flower-white hand and  
 kissed,  
 Laughing ; and through his fair face as in shame  
 The light blood lightened. " Hear they no such  
 name ? "

She said ; and he, " If there be such a word,  
 I wot the queen's poor harper hath not heard."  
 Then, as the fuller-feathered hours grew long,  
 He holp to speed their warm slow feet with song.

" Love, is it morning risen or night deceased  
 That makes the mirth of this triumphant east ?  
 Is it bliss given or bitterness put by  
 That makes most glad men's hearts at love's high feast ?  
 Grief smiles, joy weeps, that day should live and die.

" Is it with soul's thirst or with body's drouth  
 That summer yearns out sunward to the south,  
 With all the flowers that when thy birth drew nigh  
 Were molten in one rose to make thy mouth ?  
 O love, what care though day should live and die ?

" Is the sun glad of all the love on earth,  
 The spirit and sense and work of things and worth ?  
 Is the moon sad because the month must fly  
 And bring her death that can but bring back birth ?  
 For all these things as day must live and die.

" Love, is it day that makes thee thy delight  
 Or thou that seest day made out of thy light ?  
 Love, as the sun and sea are thou and I,  
 Sea without sun dark, sun without sea bright ;  
 The sun is one though day should live and die.

" O which is elder, night or light, who knows ?  
 And life or love, which first of these twain grows ?  
 For life is born of love to wail and cry,  
 And love is born of life to heal his woes,  
 And light of night, that day should live and die.

" O sun of heaven above the worldly sea,  
 O very love, what light is this of thee !  
 My sea of soul is deep as thou art high,  
 But all thy light is shed through all of me,  
 As love's through love, while day shall live and die.

"Nay," said Iseult, "your song is hard to read."

"Ay?" said he: "or too light a song to heed,  
Too slight to follow, it may be? Who shall sing  
Of love but as a churl before a king  
If by love's worth men rate his worthiness?  
Yet as the poor churl's worth to sing is less,  
Surely the more shall be the great king's grace  
To show for churlish love a kindlier face."

"No churl," she said, "but one in soothsayer's  
wise

Who tells but truths that help no more than lies.  
I have heard men sing of love a simpler way  
Than these wrought riddles made of night and  
day,  
Like jewelled reins whereon the rhyme-bells hang."  
And Tristram smiled and changed his song and  
sang.

"The breath between my lips of lips not mine,  
Like spirit in sense that makes pure sense divine,  
Is as life in them from the living sky  
That entering fills my heart with blood of thine  
And thee with me, while day shall live and die.

"Thy soul is shed into me with thy breath,  
And in my heart each heartbeat of thee saith  
How in thy life the lifesprings of me lie,  
Even one life to be gathered of one death  
In me and thee, though day may live and die.

"Ah, who knows now if in my veins it be  
My blood that feels life sweet, or blood of thee,  
And this thine eyesight kindled in mine eye  
That shows me in thy flesh the soul of me,  
For thine made mine, while day may live and die?

“ Ah, who knows yet if one be twain or one,  
 And sunlight separable again from sun,  
 And I from thee with all my lifesprings dry,  
 And thou from me with all thine heartbeats done,  
 Dead separate souls while day shall live and die ?

“ I see my soul within thine eyes, and hear  
 My spirit in all thy pulses thrill with fear,  
 And in my lips the passion of thee sigh,  
 And music of me made in mine own ear ;  
 Am I not thou while day shall live and die ?

“ Art thou not I as I thy love am thou ?  
 So let all things pass from us ; we are now,  
 For all that was and will be, who knows why ?  
 And all that is and is not, who knows how ?  
 Who knows ? God knows why day should live and die.”

And Iseult mused and spake no word, but sought  
 Through all the hushed ways of her tongueless  
 thought

What face or covered likeness of a face  
 In what veiled hour or dream-determined place  
 She seeing might take for love’s face, and believe  
 This was the spirit to whom all spirits cleave.  
 For that sweet wonder of the twain made one  
 And each one twain, incorporate sun with sun,  
 Star with star molten, soul with soul imbued,  
 And all the soul’s works, all their multitude,  
 Made one thought and one vision and one song,  
 Love—this thing, this, laid hand on her so strong  
 She could not choose but yearn till she should see.  
 So went she musing down her thoughts ; but he,  
 Sweet-hearted as a bird that takes the sun  
 With clear strong eyes and feels the glad god run

Bright through his blood and wide rejoicing wings,  
And opens all himself to heaven and sings,  
Made her mind light and full of noble mirth  
With words and songs the gladdest grown on earth,  
Till she was blithe and high of heart as he.  
So swam the Swallow through the springing sea.

And while they sat at speech as at a feast,  
Came a light wind fast hardening forth of the east  
And blackening till its might had marred the skies ;  
And the sea thrilled as with heart-sundering sighs  
One after one drawn, with each breath it drew,  
And the green hardened into iron blue,  
And the soft light went out of all its face.

Then Tristram girt him for an oarsman's place  
And took his oar and smote, and toiled with might  
In the east wind's full face and the strong sea's spite  
Labouring ; and all the rowers rowed hard, but he  
More mightily than any wearier three.

And Iseult watched him rowing with sinless eyes  
That loved him but in holy girlish wise  
For noble joy in his fair manliness  
And trust and tender wonder ; none the less  
She thought if God had given her grace to be  
Man, and make war on danger of earth and sea,  
Even such a man she would be ; for his stroke  
Was mightiest as the mightier water broke,  
And in sheer measure like strong music drove  
Clean through the wet weight of the wallowing  
wave ;

And as a tune before a great king played  
For triumph was the tune their strong strokes made,  
And sped the ship through with smooth strife of  
oars  
Over the mid sea's grey foam-paven floors,

For all the loud breach of the waves at will.  
So for an hour they fought the storm out still,  
And the shorn foam spun from the blades, and high  
The keel sprang from the wave-ridge, and the sky  
Glared at them for a breath's space through the  
rain ;

Then the bows with a sharp shock plunged again  
Down, and the sea clashed on them, and so rose  
The bright stem like one panting from swift blows,  
And as a swimmer's joyous beaten head  
Rears itself laughing, so in that sharp stead  
The light ship lifted her long quivering bows  
As might the man his buffeted strong brows  
Out of the wave-breath ; for with one stroke yet  
Went all men's oars together, strongly set  
As to loud music, and with hearts uplift  
They smote their strong way through the drench and  
drift :

Till the keen hour had chafed itself to death  
And the east wind fell fitfully, breath by breath,  
Tired ; and across the thin and slackening rain  
Sprang the face southward of the sun again.  
Then all they rested and were eased at heart ;  
And Iseult rose up where she sat apart,  
And with her sweet soul deepening her deep eyes  
Cast the furs from her and subtle embroideries  
That wrapped her from the storming rain and  
spray,  
And shining like all April in one day,  
Hair, face, and throat dashed with the straying  
showers,  
She stood the first of all the whole world's flowers,  
And laughed on Tristram with her eyes, and said,  
“I too have heart then, I was not afraid.”

And answering some light courteous word of grace  
He saw her clear face lighten on his face  
Unwittingly, with unenamoured eyes,  
For the last time. A live man in such wise  
Looks in the deadly face of his fixed hour  
And laughs with lips wherein he hath no power  
To keep the life yet some five minutes' space.  
So Tristram looked on Iseult face to face  
And knew not, and she knew not. The last time—  
The last that should be told in any rhyme  
Heard anywhere on mouths of singing men  
That ever should sing praise of them again ;  
The last hour of their hurtless hearts at rest,  
The last that peace should touch them, breast to  
breast,

The last that sorrow far from them should sit,  
This last was with them, and they knew not it.

For Tristram being athirst with toil now spake,  
Saying, “Iseult, for all dear love’s labour’s sake  
Give me to drink, and give me for a pledge  
The touch of four lips on the beaker’s edge.”  
And Iseult sought and would not wake Brangwain  
Who slept as one half dead with fear and pain,  
Being tender-natured ; so with hushed light feet  
Went Iseult round her, with soft looks and sweet  
Pitying her pain ; so sweet a spirited thing  
She was, and daughter of a kindly king.  
And spying what strange bright secret charge was  
kept

Fast in that maid’s white bosom while she slept,  
She sought and drew the gold cup forth and smiled  
Marvelling, with such light wonder as a child  
That hears of glad sad life in magic lands ;  
And bare it back to Tristram with pure hands

Holding the love-draught that should be for flame  
 To burn out of them fear and faith and shame,  
 And lighten all their life up in men's sight,  
 And make them sad for ever. Then the knight  
 Bowed toward her and craved whence had she this  
 strange thing

That might be spoil of some dim Asian king,  
 By starlight stolen from some waste place of sands,  
 And a maid bore it here in harmless hands.  
 And Iseult, laughing—"Other lords that be  
 Feast, and their men feast after them ; but we,  
 Our men must keep the best wine back to feast  
 Till they be full and we of all men least  
 Feed after them and fain to fare so well :  
 So with mine handmaid and your squire it fell  
 That hid this bright thing from us in a wile :"  
 And with light lips yet full of their swift smile,  
 And hands that wist not though they dug a  
 grave,

Undid the hasps of gold, and drank, and gave,  
 And he drank after, a deep glad kingly draught :  
 And all their life changed in them, for they quaffed  
 Death ; if it be death so to drink, and fare  
 As men who change and are what these twain  
 were.

And shuddering with eyes full of fear and fire  
 And heart-stung with a serpentine desire  
 He turned and saw the terror in her eyes  
 That yearned upon him shining in such wise  
 As a star midway in the midnight fixed.

Their Galahault was the cup, and she that  
 mixed ;  
 Nor other hand there needed, nor sweet speech  
 To lure their lips together ; each on each

38 THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Hung with strange eyes and hovered as a bird  
Wounded, and each mouth trembled for a word ;  
Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn in  
one,

And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun  
Far through fine rain shot fire into the south ;  
And their four lips became one burning mouth.

## II

## THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

OUT of the night arose the second day,  
And saw the ship's bows break the shoreward spray.  
As the sun's boat of gold and fire began  
To sail the sea of heaven unsailed of man,  
And the soft waves of sacred air to break  
Round the prow launched into the morning's lake,  
They saw the sign of their sea-travel done.

Ah, was not something seen of yester-sun,  
When the sweet light that lightened all the skies  
Saw nothing fairer than one maiden's eyes,  
That whatsoever in all time's years may be  
To-day's sun nor to-morrow's sun shall see ?  
Not while she lives, not when she comes to die,  
Shall she look sunward with that sinless eye.

Yet fairer now than song may show them stand  
Tristram and Iseult, hand in amorous hand,  
Soul-satisfied, their eyes made great and bright  
With all the love of all the livelong night ;  
With all its hours yet singing in their ears  
No mortal music made of thoughts and tears,  
But such a song, past conscience of man's thought,  
As hearing he grows god and knows it not.

Nought else they saw nor heard but what the night

Had left for seal upon their sense and sight,  
Sound of past pulses beating, fire of amorous light.  
Enough, and overmuch, and never yet  
Enough, though love still hungering feed and fret,  
To fill the cup of night which dawn must overset.  
For still their eyes were dimmer than with tears  
And dizzier from diviner sounds their ears  
Than though from choral thunders of the quiring  
    spheres.

They heard not how the landward waters rang,  
Nor saw where high into the morning sprang,  
Riven from the shore and bastioned with the sea,  
Toward summits where the north wind's nest might  
    be,

A wave-walled palace with its eastern gate  
Full of the sunrise now and wide at wait,  
And on the mighty-moulded stairs that clomb  
Sheer from the fierce lip of the lapping foam  
The knights of Mark that stood before the wall.  
So with loud joy and storm of festival  
They brought the bride in up the towery way  
That rose against the rising front of day,  
Stair based on stair, between the rocks unhewn,  
To those strange halls wherethrough the tidal tune  
Rang loud or lower from soft or strengthening sea,  
Tower shouldering tower, to windward and to lee,  
With change of floors and stories, flight on flight,  
That clomb and curled up to the crowning height  
Whence men might see wide east and west in one  
And on one sea waned moon and mounting sun.  
And severed from the sea-rock's base, where stand  
Some worn walls yet they saw the broken strand,

The beachless cliff that in the sheer sea dips,  
The sleepless shore inexorable to ships,  
And the straight causeway's bare gaunt spine between  
The sea-spanned walls and naked mainland's green.

On the mid stairs, between the light and dark,  
Before the main tower's portal stood King Mark,  
Crowned : and his face was as the face of one  
Long time athirst and hungering for the sun  
In barren thrall of bitter bonds, who now  
Thinks here to feel its blessing on his brow.  
A swart lean man, but kinglike, still of guise,  
With black streaked beard and cold unquiet eyes,  
Close-mouthed, gaunt-cheeked, wan as a morning  
moon,

Though hardly time on his worn hair had strewn  
The thin first ashes from a sparing hand :  
Yet little fire there burnt upon the brand,  
And way-worn seemed he with life's wayfaring.  
So between shade and sunlight stood the king,  
And his face changed nor yearned not toward his  
bride ;

But fixed between mild hope and patient pride  
Abode what gift of rare or lesser worth  
This day might bring to all his days on earth.  
But at the glory of her when she came  
His heart endured not : very fear and shame  
Smote him, to take her by the hand and kiss,  
Till both were molten in the burning bliss,  
And with a thin flame flushing his cold face  
He led her silent to the bridal place.

There were they wed and hallowed of the priest ;  
And all the loud time of the marriage feast  
One thought within three hearts was as a fire,  
Where craft and faith took counsel with desire.

For when the feast had made a glorious end  
They gave the new queen for her maids to tend  
At dawn of bride-night, and thereafter bring  
With marriage music to the bridegroom king.  
Then by device of craft between them laid  
To him went Brangwain delicately, and prayed  
That this thing even for love's sake might not be,  
But without sound or light or eye to see  
She might come in to bride-bed : and he laughed,  
As one that wist not well of wise love's craft,  
And bade all bridal things be as she would.  
Yet of his gentleness he gat not good ;  
For clothed and covered with the nuptial dark  
Soft like a bride came Brangwain to King Mark,  
And to the queen came Tristram ; and the night  
Fled, and ere danger of detective light  
From the king sleeping Brangwain slid away,  
And where had lain her handmaid Iseult lay.  
And the king waking saw beside his head  
That face yet passion-coloured, amorous red  
From lips not his, and all that strange hair shed  
Across the tissued pillows, fold on fold,  
Innumerable, incomparable, all gold,  
To fire men's eyes with wonder, and with love  
Men's hearts ; so shone its flowering crown above  
The brows enwound with that imperial wreath,  
And framed with fragrant radiance round the face  
beneath.

And the king marvelled, seeing with sudden start  
Her very glory, and said out of his heart ;  
“ What have I done of good for God to bless  
That all this he should give me, tress on tress,  
All this great wealth and wondrous ? Was it this  
That in mine arms I had all night to kiss,

And mix with me this beauty ? this that seems  
More fair than heaven doth in some tired saint's  
dreams,

Being part of that same heaven ? yea, more, for he,  
Though loved of God so, yet but seems to see,  
But to me sinful such great grace is given  
That in mine hands I hold this part of heaven,  
Not to mine eyes lent merely. Doth God make  
Such things so godlike for man's mortal sake ?  
Have I not sinned, that in this fleshly life  
Have made of her a mere man's very wife ?"

So the king mused and murmured ; and she  
heard

The faint sound trembling of each breathless word,  
And laughed into the covering of her hair.

And many a day for many a month as fair  
Slid over them like music ; and as bright  
Burned with love's offerings many a secret night.  
And many a dawn to many a fiery noon  
Blew prelude, when the horn's heart-kindling tune  
Lit the live woods with sovereign sound of mirth  
Before the mightiest huntsman hailed on earth  
Lord of its lordliest pleasure, where he rode  
Hard by her rein whose peerless presence glowed  
Not as that white queen's of the virgin hunt  
Once, whose crown-crescent braves the night-wind's  
brunt,

But with the sun for frontlet of a queenlier front.  
For where the flashing of her face was turned  
As lightning was the fiery light that burned  
From eyes and brows enkindled more with speed  
And rapture of the rushing of her steed  
Than once with only beauty ; and her mouth  
Was as a rose athirst that pants for drouth

Even while it laughs for pleasure of desire,  
And all her heart was as a leaping fire.  
Yet once more joy they took of woodland ways  
Than came of all those flushed and fiery days  
When the loud air was mad with life and sound,  
Through many a dense green mile, of horn and hound  
Before the king's hunt going along the wind,  
And ere the timely leaves were changed or thinned,  
Even in mid maze of summer. For the knight  
Forth was once ridden toward some frontier fight  
Against the lewd folk of the Christless lands  
That warred with wild and intermittent hands  
Against the king's north border ; and there came  
A knight unchristened yet of unknown name,  
Swart Palamede, upon a secret quest,  
To high Tintagel, and abode as guest  
In likeness of a minstrel with the king.  
Nor was there man could sound so sweet a string,  
Save Tristram only, of all held best on earth.  
And one loud eve, being full of wine and mirth,  
Ere sunset left the walls and waters dark,  
To that strange minstrel strongly swore King Mark,  
By all that makes a knight's faith firm and strong,  
That he for guerdon of his harp and song  
Might crave and have his liking. Straight there came  
Up the swart cheek a flash of swarthier flame,  
And the deep eyes fulfilled of glittering night  
Laughed out in lightnings of triumphant light  
As the grim harper spake : " O king, I crave  
No gift of man that king may give to slave,  
But this thy crowned queen only, this thy wife,  
Whom yet unseen I loved, and set my life  
On this poor chance to compass, even as here,  
Being fairer famed than all save Guenevere."

Then as the noise of seaward storm that mocks  
With roaring laughter from reverberate rocks  
The cry from ships near shipwreck, harsh and high  
Rose all the wrath and wonder in one cry  
Through all the long roof's hollow depth and length  
That hearts of strong men kindled in their strength  
May speak in laughter lion-like, and cease,  
Being wearied : only two men held their peace  
And each glared hard on other : but King Mark  
Spake first of these : " Man, though thy craft be dark  
And thy mind evil that begat this thing,  
Yet stands the word once plighted of a king  
Fast : and albeit less evil it were for me  
To give my life up than my wife, or be  
A landless man crowned only with a curse,  
Yet this in God's and all men's sight were worse,  
To live soul-shamed, a man of broken troth,  
Abhorred of men as I abhor mine oath  
Which yet I may forswear not." And he bowed  
His head, and wept : and all men wept aloud,  
Save one, that heard him weeping : but the queen  
Wept not : and statelier yet than eyes had seen  
That ever looked upon her queenly state  
She rose, and in her eyes her heart was great  
And full of wrath seen manifest and scorn  
More strong than anguish to go thence forlorn  
Of all men's comfort and her natural right.  
And they went forth into the dawn of night.  
Long by wild ways and clouded light they rode,  
Silent ; and fear less keen at heart abode  
With Iseult than with Palamede : for awe  
Constrained him, and the might of love's high law,  
That can make lewd men loyal ; and his heart  
Yearned on her, if perchance with amorous art

And soothfast skill of very love he might  
For courtesy find favour in her sight  
And comfort of her mercies : for he wist  
More grace might come of that sweet mouth unkissed  
Than joy for violence done it, that should make  
His name abhorred for shame's disloyal sake.  
And in the stormy starlight clouds were thinned  
And thickened by short gusts of changing wind  
That panted like a sick man's fitful breath :  
And like a moan of lions hurt to death  
Came the sea's hollow noise along the night.  
But ere its gloom from aught but foam had light  
They halted, being aweary : and the knight  
As reverently forbore her where she lay  
As one that watched his sister's sleep till day.  
Nor durst he kiss or touch her hand or hair  
For love and shamefast pity, seeing how fair  
She slept, and fenceless from the fitful air.  
And shame at heart stung nigh to death desire,  
But grief at heart burned in him like a fire  
For hers and his own sorrowing sake, that had  
Such grace for guerdon as makes glad men sad,  
To have their will and want it. And the day  
Sprang : and afar along the wild waste way  
They heard the pulse and press of hurrying horse  
    hoofs play :  
And like the rushing of a ravenous flame  
Whose wings make tempest of the darkness, came  
Upon them headlong as in thunder borne  
Forth of the darkness of the labouring morn  
Tristram : and up forthright upon his steed  
Leapt, as one blithe of battle, Palamede,  
And mightily with shock of horse and man  
They lashed together : and fair that fight began

As fair came up that sunrise : to and fro,  
With knees nigh staggered and stout heads bent low  
From each quick shock of spears on either side,  
Reeled the strong steeds heavily, haggard-eyed  
And heartened high with passion of their pride  
As sheer the stout spears shocked again, and flew  
Sharp-splintering : then, his sword as each knight  
drew,

They flashed and foined full royally, so long  
That but to see so fair a strife and strong  
A man might well have given out of his life  
One year's void space forlorn of love or strife.  
As when a bright north-easter, great of heart,  
Scattering the strengths of squadrons, hurls apart  
Ship from ship labouring violently, in such toil  
As earns but ruin—with even so strong recoil  
Back were the steeds hurled from the spear-shock,  
fain

And foiled of triumph : then with tightened rein  
And stroke of spur, inveterate, either knight  
Bore in again upon his foe with might,  
Heart-hungry for the hot-mouthed feast of fight  
And all athirst of mastery : but full soon  
The jarring notes of that tempestuous tune  
Fell, and its mighty music made of hands  
Contending, clamorous through the loud waste lands,  
Broke at once off ; and shattered from his steed  
Fell, as a mainmast ruining, Palamede,  
Stunned : and those lovers left him where he lay,  
And lightly through green lawns they rode away.

There was a bower beyond man's eye more fair  
Than ever summer dews and sunniest air  
Fed full with rest and radiance till the boughs  
Had wrought a roof as for a holier house

Than aught save love might breathe in ; fairer far  
Than keeps the sweet light back of moon and star  
From high kings' chambers : there might love and sleep  
Divide for joy the darkling hours, and keep  
With amorous alternation of sweet strife  
The soft and secret ways of death and life  
Made smooth for pleasure's feet to rest and run  
Even from the moondawn to the kindling sun,  
Made bright for passion's feet to run and rest  
Between the midnight's and the morning's breast,  
Where hardly though her happy head lie down  
It may forget the hour that wove its crown ;  
Where hardly though her joyous limbs be laid  
They may forget the mirth that midnight made.  
And thither, ere sweet night had slain sweet day,  
Iseult and Tristram took their wandering way,  
And rested, and refreshed their hearts with cheer  
In hunters' fashion of the woods ; and here  
More sweet it seemed, while this might be, to dwell  
And take of all world's weariness farewell  
Than reign of all world's lordship queen and king.  
Nor here would time for three moons' changes bring  
Sorrow nor thought of sorrow ; but sweet earth  
Fostered them like her babes of eldest birth,  
Reared warm in pathless woods and cherished well.  
And the sun sprang above the sea and fell,  
And the stars rose and sank upon the sea ;  
And outlaw-like, in forest wise and free,  
The rising and the setting of their lights  
Found those twain dwelling all those days and nights.  
And under change of sun and star and moon  
Flourished and fell the chaplets woven of June,  
And fair through fervours of the deepening sky  
Panted and passed the hours that lit July,

And each day blessed them out of heaven above,  
And each night crowned them with the crown of love.  
Nor till the might of August overhead  
Weighed on the world was yet one roseleaf shed  
Of all their joy's warm coronal, nor aught  
Touched them in passing ever with a thought  
That ever this might end on any day  
Or any night not love them where they lay ;  
But like a babbling tale of barren breath  
Seemed all report and rumour held of death,  
And a false bruit the legend tear-impearled  
That such a thing as change was in the world.  
And each bright song upon his lips that came,  
Mocking the powers of change and death by name,  
Blasphemed their bitter godhead, and defied  
Time, though clothed round with ruin as kings with  
pride,  
To blot the glad life out of love : and she  
Drank lightly deep of his philosophy  
In that warm wine of amorous words which is  
Sweet with all truths of all philosophies.  
For well he wist all subtle ways of song,  
And in his soul the secret eye was strong  
That burns in meditation, till bright words  
Break flamelike forth as notes from fledgeling birds  
That feel the soul speak through them of the spring.  
So fared they night and day as queen and king  
Crowned of a kingdom wide as day and night.  
Nor ever cloudlet swept or swam in sight  
Across the darkling depths of their delight  
Whose stars no skill might number, nor man's art  
Sound the deep stories of its heavenly heart.  
Till, even for wonder that such life should live,  
Desires and dreams of what death's self might give

Would touch with tears and laughter and wild speech  
The lips and eyes of passion, fain to reach,  
Beyond all bourne of time or trembling sense,  
The verge of love's last possible eminence.  
Out of the heaven that storm nor shadow mars,  
Deep from the starry depth beyond the stars,  
A yearning ardour without scope or name  
Fell on them, and the bright' night's breath of flame  
Shot fire into their kisses ; and like fire  
The lit dews lightened on the leaves, as higher  
Night's heart beat on toward midnight. Far and fain  
Somewhile斯 the soft rush of rejoicing rain  
Solaced the darkness, and from steep to steep  
Of heaven they saw the sweet sheet lightning leap  
And laugh its heart out in a thousand smiles,  
When the clear sea for miles on glimmering miles  
Burned as though dawn were strewn abroad astray,  
Or, showering out of heaven, all heaven's array  
Had paven instead the waters : fain and far  
Somewhile斯 the burning love of star for star  
Spake words that love might wellnigh seem to hear  
In such deep hours as turn delight to fear  
Sweet as delight's self ever. So they lay  
Tranced once, nor watched along the fiery bay  
The shine of summer darkness palpitate and play.  
She had nor sight nor voice ; her swooning eyes  
Knew not if night or light were in the skies ;  
Across her beauty sheer the moondawn shed  
Its light as on a thing as white and dead ;  
Only with stress of soft fierce hands she prest  
Between the throbbing blossoms of her breast  
His ardent face, and through his hair her breath  
Went quivering as when life is hard on death ;  
And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast  
His head into her bosom ; till at last.

Satiate with sweetness of that burning bed,  
His eyes afire with tears, he raised his head  
And laughed into her lips ; and all his heart  
Filled hers ; then face from face fell, and apart  
Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt  
Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt.

“Hast thou no sword ? I would not live till day ,  
O love, this night and we must pass away,  
It must die soon, and let not us die late.”

“Take then my sword and slay me ; nay, but wait  
Till day be risen ; what, wouldst thou think to die  
Before the light take hold upon the sky ? ”

“Yea, love ; for how shall we have twice, being  
twain,

This very night of love’s most rapturous reign ?  
Live thou and have thy day, and year by year  
Be great, but what shall I be ? Slay me here ;  
Let me die not when love lies dead, but now  
Strike through my heart : nay, sweet, what heart hast  
thou ?

Is it so much I ask thee, and spend my breath  
In asking ? nay, thou knowest it is but death.  
Hadst thou true heart to love me, thou wouldst give  
This : but for hate’s sake thou wilt let me live.”

Here he caught up her lips with his, and made  
The wild prayer silent in her heart that prayed,  
And strained her to him till all her faint breath  
sank

And her bright light limbs palpitated and shrank  
And rose and fluctuated as flowers in rain  
That bends them and they tremble and rise again  
And heave and straighten and quiver all through with  
bliss

And turn afresh their mouths up for a kiss,

Amorous, athirst of that sweet influent love ;  
So, hungering towards his hovering lips above,  
Her red-rose mouth yearned silent, and her eyes  
Closed, and flashed after, as through June's darkest  
skies

The divine heartbeats of the deep live light  
Make open and shut the gates of the outer night.

Long lay they still, subdued with love, nor knew  
If cloud or light changed colour as it grew,  
If star or moon beheld them ; if above  
The heaven of night waxed fiery with their love,  
Or earth beneath were moved at heart and root  
To burn as they, to burn and bring forth fruit  
Unseasonable for love's sake ; if tall trees  
Bowed, and close flowers yearned open, and the  
breeze

Failed and fell silent as a flame that fails :  
And all that hour unheard the nightingales  
Clamoured, and all the woodland soul was stirred,  
And depth and height were one great song unheard,  
As though the world caught music and took fire  
From the instant heart alone of their desire.

So sped their night of nights between them : so,  
For all fears past and shadows, shine and snow,  
That one pure hour all-golden where they lay  
Made their life perfect and their darkness day.  
And warmer waved its harvest yet to reap,  
Till in the lovely fight of love and sleep  
At length had sleep the mastery ; and the dark  
Was lit with soft live gleams they might not mark,  
Fleet butterflies, each like a dead flower's ghost,  
White, blue, and sere leaf-coloured ; but the most  
White as the sparkle of snow-flowers in the sun  
Ere with his breath they lie at noon undone

Whose kiss devours their tender beauty, and leaves  
But raindrops on the grass and sere thin leaves  
That were engraven with traceries of the snow  
Flowerwise ere any flower of earth's would blow ;  
So swift they sprang and sank, so sweet and light  
They swam the deep dim breathless air of night.  
Now on her rose-white amorous breast half bare,  
Now on her slumberous love-dishevelled hair,  
The white wings lit and vanished, and afresh  
Lit soft as snow lights on her snow-soft flesh,  
On hand or throat or shoulder ; and she stirred  
Sleeping, and spake some tremulous bright word,  
And laughed upon some dream too sweet for truth,  
Yet not so sweet as very love and youth  
That there had charmed her eyes to sleep at last.  
Nor woke they till the perfect night was past,  
And the soft sea thrilled with blind hope of light.  
But ere the dusk had well the sun in sight  
He turned and kissed her eyes awake and said,  
Seeing earth and water neither quick nor dead  
And twilight hungering toward the day to be,  
“ As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee.”  
And even as rays with cloudlets in the skies  
Confused in brief love’s bright contentious wise,  
Sleep strove with sense rekindling in her eyes ;  
And as the flush of birth scarce overcame  
The pale pure pearl of unborn light with flame  
Soft as may touch the rose’s heart with shame  
To break not all reluctant out of bud,  
Stole up her sleeping cheek her waking blood ;  
And with the lovely laugh of love that takes  
The whole soul prisoner ere the whole sense wakes,  
Her lips for love’s sake bade love’s will be done.  
And all the sea lay subject to the sun.

## III

## TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

“ ‘ As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee :  
As men that shall be swallowed of the sea  
Love the sea’s lovely beauty ; as the night  
That wanes before it loves the young sweet light,  
And dies of loving ; as the worn-out noon  
Loves twilight, and as twilight loves the moon  
That on its grave a silver seal shall set—  
We have loved and slain each other, and love yet.  
Slain ; for we live not surely, being in twain :  
In her I lived, and in me she is slain,  
Who loved me that I brought her to her doom,  
Who loved her that her love might be my tomb.  
As all the streams on earth and all fresh springs  
And sweetest waters, every brook that sings,  
Each fountain where the young year dips its wings  
First, and the first-fledged branches of it wave,  
Even with one heart’s love seek one bitter grave.  
From hills that first see bared the morning’s breast  
And heights the sun last yearns to from the west,  
All tend but toward the sea, all born most high  
Strive downward, passing all things joyous by,  
Seek to it and cast their lives in it and die.

So strive all lives for death which all lives win ;  
So sought her soul to my soul, and therein  
Was poured and perished : O my love, and mine  
Sought to thee and died of thee and died as thine.  
As the dawn loves the sunlight that must cease  
Ere dawn again may rise and pass in peace ;  
Must die that she being dead may live again,  
To be by his new rising nearly slain.

So rolls the great wheel of the great world round,  
And no change in it and no fault is found,  
And no true life of perdurable breath,  
And surely no irrevocable death.

Day after day night comes that day may break,  
And day comes back for night's reiterate sake.  
Each into each dies, each of each is born :  
Day past is night, shall night past not be morn ?  
Out of this moonless and faint-hearted night  
That love yet lives in, shall there not be light ?  
Light strong as love, that love may live in yet ?  
Alas, but how shall foolish hope forget  
How all these loving things that kill and die  
Meet not but for a breath's space and pass by ?  
Night is kissed once of dawn and dies, and day  
But touches twilight and is rapt away.

So may my love and her love meet once more,  
And meeting be divided as of yore.  
Yea, surely as the day-star loves the sun  
And when he hath risen is utterly undone,  
So is my love of her and hers of me—  
And its most sweetness bitter as the sea.  
Would God yet dawn might see the sun and die ! ”

Three years had looked on earth and passed it by  
Since Tristram looked on Iseult, when he stood  
So communing with dreams of evil and good,

And let all sad thoughts through his spirit sweep  
As leaves through air or tears through eyes that weep  
Or snowflakes through dark weather : and his soul,  
That had seen all those sightless seasons roll  
One after one, wave over weary wave,  
Was in him as a corpse is in its grave.  
Yet, for his heart was mighty, and his might  
Through all the world as a great sound and light,  
The mood was rare upon him ; save that here  
In the low sundawn of the lightening year  
With all last year's toil and its triumph done  
He could not choose but yearn for that set sun  
Which at this season saw the firstborn kiss  
That made his lady's mouth one fire with his.  
Yet his great heart being greater than his grief  
Kept all the summer of his strength in leaf  
And all the rose of his sweet spirit in flower ;  
Still his soul fed upon the sovereign hour  
That had been or that should be ; and once more  
He looked through drifted sea and drifting shore  
That crumbled in the wave-breach, and again  
Spake sad and deep within himself : "What pain  
Should make a man's soul wholly break and die,  
Sapped as weak sand by water ? How shall I  
Be less than all less things are that endure  
And strive and yield when time is ? Nay, full sure  
All these and we are parts of one same end ;  
And if through fire or water we twain tend  
To that sure life where both must be made one,  
If one we be, what matter ? Thou, O sun,  
The face of God, if God thou be not—nay,  
What but God should I think thee, what should say,  
Seeing thee risen, but very God ?—should I,  
I fool, rebuke thee sovereign in thy sky,

The clouds dead round thee and the air alive,  
The winds that lighten and the waves that strive  
Toward this shore as to that beneath thy breath,  
Because in me my thoughts bear all towards death !  
O sun, that when we are dead wilt rise as bright,  
Air deepening up toward heaven, and nameless light,  
And heaven immeasurable, and faint clouds blown  
Between us and the lowest aerial zone  
And each least skirt of their imperial state—  
Forgive us that we held ourselves so great !  
What should I do to curse you ? I indeed  
Am a thing meaner than this least wild weed  
That my foot bruises and I know not—yet  
Would not be mean enough for worms to fret  
Before their time and mine was.

“ Ah, and ye

Light washing weeds, blind waifs of dull blind sea,  
Do ye so thirst and hunger and aspire,  
Are ye so moved with such long strong desire  
In the ebb and flow of your sad life, and strive  
Still toward some end ye shall not see alive—  
But at high noon ye know it by light and heat  
Some half-hour, till ye feel the fresh tide beat  
Up round you, and at night’s most bitter noon  
The ripples leave you naked to the moon ?  
And this dim dusty heather that I tread,  
These half-born blossoms, born at once and dead,  
Sere brown as funeral cloths, and purple as pall,  
What if some life and grief be in them all ?

“ Ay, what of these ? but, O strong sun ! O sea !  
I bid not you, divine things ! comfort me,  
I stand not up to match you in your sight—  
Who hath said ye have mercy toward us, ye who have  
might ?

And though ye had mercy, I think I would not pray  
That ye should change your counsel or your way  
To make our life less bitter : if such power  
Be given the stars on one deciduous hour,  
And such might be in planets to destroy  
Grief and rebuild, and break and build up joy,  
What man would stretch forth hand on them to make-  
Fate mutable, God foolish, for his sake ?  
For if in life or death be aught of trust,  
And if some unseen just God or unjust  
Put soul into the body of natural things  
And in time's pauseless feet and worldwide wings  
Some spirit of impulse and some sense of will  
That steers them through the seas of good and ill  
To some incognizable and actual end,  
Be it just or unjust, foe to man or friend,  
How should we make the stable spirit to swerve,  
How teach the strong soul of the world to serve,  
The imperious will in time and sense in space  
That gives man life turn back to give man place—  
The conscious law lose conscience of its way,  
The rule and reason fail from night and day,  
The streams flow back toward whence the springs  
    began,  
That less of thirst might sear the lips of man ?  
Let that which is be, and sure strengths stand sure,  
And evil or good and death or life endure,  
Not alterable and rootless, but indeed  
A very stem born of a very seed  
That brings forth fruit in season : how should this  
Die that was sown, and that not be which is,  
And the old fruit change that came of the ancient  
    root,  
And he that planted bid it not bear fruit,

And he that watered smite his vine with drouth  
Because its grapes are bitter in our mouth,  
And he that kindled quench the sun with night  
Because its beams are fire against our sight,  
And he that tuned untune the sounding spheres  
Because their song is thunder in our ears ?  
How should the skies change and the stars, and  
time

Break the large concord of the years that chime,  
Answering, as wave to wave beneath the moon  
That draws them shoreward, mar the whole tide's  
tune

For the instant foam's sake on one turning wave—  
For man's sake that is grass upon a grave ?  
How should the law that knows not soon or late,  
For whom no time nor space is—how should fate,  
That is not good nor evil, wise nor mad,  
Nor just nor unjust, neither glad nor sad—  
How should the one thing that hath being, the one  
That moves not as the stars move or the sun  
Or any shadow or shape that lives or dies  
In likeness of dead earth or living skies,  
But its own darkness and its proper light  
Clothe it with other names than day or night,  
And its own soul of strength and spirit of breath.  
Feed it with other powers than life or death—  
How should it turn from its great way to give  
Man that must die a clearer space to live ?  
Why should the waters of the sea be cleft,  
The hills be molten to his right and left,  
That he from deep to deep might pass dry-shod,  
Or look between the viewless heights on God ?  
Hath he such eyes as, when the shadows flee,  
The sun looks out with to salute the sea ?

Is his hand bounteous as the morning's hand ?  
Or where the night stands hath he feet to stand ?  
Will the storm cry not when he bids it cease ?  
Is it his voice that saith to the east wind, Peace ?  
Is his breath mightier than the west wind's breath ?  
Doth h's heart know the things of life and death ?  
Can his face bring forth sunshine and give rain,  
Or his weak will that dies and lives again  
Make one thing certain or bind one thing fast,  
That as he willed it shall be at the last ?  
How should the storms of heaven and kindled lights  
And all the depths of things and topless heights  
And air and earth and fire and water change  
Their likeness, and the natural world grow strange,  
And all the limits of their life undone  
Lose count of time and conscience of the sun,  
And that fall under which was fixed above,  
That man might have a larger hour for love ? "

So musing with close lips and lifted eyes  
That smiled with self-contempt to live so wise,  
With silent heart so hungry now so long,  
So late grown clear, so miserably made strong,  
About the wolds a banished man he went,  
The brown wolds bare and sad as banishment,  
By wastes of fruitless flowerage, and grey downs  
That felt the sea-wind shake their wild-flower  
crowns  
As though fierce hands would pluck from some grey  
head  
The spoils of majesty despised and dead,  
And fill with crying and comfortless strange sound  
Their hollow sides and heights of herbless ground.  
Yet as he went fresh courage on him came,  
Till dawn rose too within him as a flame ;

The heart of the ancient hills and his were one ;  
The winds took counsel with him, and the sun  
Spake comfort ; in his ears the shout of birds  
Was as the sound of clear sweet-spirited words,  
The noise of streams as laughter from above  
Of the old wild lands, and as a cry of love  
Spring's trumpet-blast blown over moor and lea :  
The skies were red as love is, and the sea  
Was as the floor of heaven for love to tread.  
So went he as with light about his head,  
And in the joyous travail of the year  
Grew April-hearted ; since nor grief nor fear  
Can master so a young man's blood so long  
That it shall move not to the mounting song  
Of that sweet hour when earth replumes her wings  
And with fair face and heart set heavenward sings  
As an awakened angel unaware  
That feels his sleep fall from him, and his hair  
By some new breath of wind and music stirred,  
Till like the sole song of one heavenly bird  
Sounds all the singing of the host of heaven,  
And all the glories of the sovereign Seven  
Are as one face of one incorporate light.  
And as that host of singers in God's sight  
Might draw toward one that slumbered, and arouse  
The lips requickened and rekindling brows,  
So seemed the earthly host of all things born  
In sight of spring and eyeshot of the morn,  
All births of land or waifs of wind and sea,  
To draw toward him that sorrowed, and set free  
From presage and remembrance of all pains  
The life that leapt and lightened in his veins.  
So with no sense abashed nor sunless look,  
But with exalted eyes and heart, he took

His part of sun or storm-wind, and was glad,  
For all things lost, of these good things he had.

And the spring loved him surely, being from birth  
One made out of the better part of earth,  
A man born as at sunrise ; one that saw  
Not without reverence and sweet sense of awe  
But wholly without fear or fitful breath  
The face of life watched by the face of death ;  
And living took his fill of rest and strife,  
Of love and change, and fruit and seed of life,  
And when his time to live in light was done  
With unbent head would pass out of the sun :  
A spirit as morning, fair and clear and strong,  
Whose thought and work were as one harp and  
song

Heard through the world as in a strange king's hall  
Some great guest's voice that sings of festival.  
So seemed all things to love him, and his heart  
In all their joy of life to take such part,  
That with the live earth and the living sea  
He was as one that communed mutually  
With naked heart to heart of friend to friend :  
And the star deepening at the sunset's end,  
And the moon fallen before the gate of day  
As one sore wearied with vain length of way,  
And the winds wandering, and the streams and  
skies,  
As faces of his fellows in his eyes.  
Nor lacked there love where he was evermore  
Of man and woman, friend of sea or shore,  
Not measurable with weight of graven gold,  
Free as the sun's gift of the world to hold  
Given each day back to man's reconquering sight  
That loses but its lordship for a night.

And now that after many a season spent  
In barren ways and works of banishment,  
Toil of strange fights and many a fruitless field,  
Ventures of quest and vigils under shield,  
He came back to the strait of sundering sea  
That parts green Cornwall from grey Brittany,  
Where dwelt the high king's daughter of the lands,  
Iseult, named alway from her fair white hands,  
She looked on him and loved him ; but being young  
Made shamefastness a seal upon her tongue,  
And on her heart, that none might hear its cry,  
Set the sweet signet of humility.

Yet when he came a stranger in her sight,  
A banished man and weary, no such knight  
As when the Swallow dipped her bows in foam  
Steered singing that imperial Iseult home,  
This maiden with her sinless sixteen years  
Full of sweet thoughts and hopes that played at  
fears

Cast her eyes on him but in courteous wise,  
And lo, the man's face burned upon her eyes  
As though she had turned them on the naked sun :  
And through her limbs she felt sweet passion run  
As fire that flowed down from her face, and beat  
Soft through stirred veins on even to her hands and  
feet

As all her body were one heart on flame,  
Athrob with love and wonder and sweet shame.  
And when he spake there sounded in her ears  
As 'twere a song out of the graves of years  
Heard, and again forgotten, and again  
Remembered with a rapturous pulse of pain.  
But as the maiden mountain snow sublime  
Takes the first sense of April's trembling time

Soft on a brow that burns not though it blush  
To feel the sunrise hardly half aflush,  
So took her soul the sense of change, nor thought  
That more than maiden love was more than nought.  
Her eyes went hardly after him, her cheek  
Grew scarce a goodlier flower to hear him speak,  
Her bright mouth no more trembled than a rose  
May for the least wind's breathless sake that blows  
Too soft to sue save for a sister's kiss,  
And if she sighed in sleep she knew not this.  
Yet in her heart hovered the thoughts of things  
Past, that with lighter or with heavier wings  
Beat round about her memory, till it burned  
With grief that brightened and with hope that  
yearned,  
Seeing him so great and sad, nor knowing what  
fate  
Had bowed and crowned a head so sad and great.  
Nor might she guess but little, first or last,  
Though all her heart so hung upon his past,  
Of what so bowed him for what sorrow's sake :  
For scarce of aught at any time he spake  
That from his own land oversea had sent  
His lordly life to barren banishment.  
Yet still or soft or keen remembrance clung  
Close round her of the least word from his tongue  
That fell by chance of courtesy, to greet  
With grace of tender thanks her pity, sweet  
As running straems to men's way-wearied feet.  
And when between strange words her name would  
fall,  
Suddenly straightway to that lure's recall  
Back would his heart bound as the falconer's bird,  
And tremble and bow down before the word.

‘Iseult’—and all the cloudlike world grew flame,  
And all his heart flashed lightning at her name ;  
“Iseult”—and all the wan waste weary skies  
Shone as his queen’s own love-enkindled eyes.  
And seeing the bright blood in his face leap up  
As red wine mantling in a royal cup  
To hear the sudden sweetness of the sound  
Ring, but ere well his heart had time to bound  
His cheek would change, and grief bow down his  
head,  
“Haply,” the girl’s heart, though she spake not,  
said,  
“This name of mine was worn of one long dead,  
Some sister that he loved :” and therewithal  
Would pity bring her heart more deep in thrall.  
But once, when winds about the world made mirth,  
And March held revel hard on April’s birth  
Till air and sea were jubilant as earth,  
Delight and doubt in sense and soul began,  
And yearning of the maiden toward the man,  
Harping on high before her : for his word  
Was fire that kindled in her heart that heard,  
And alway through the rhymes reverberate came  
The virginal soft burden of her name.  
And ere the full song failed upon her ear  
Joy strove within her till it cast out fear,  
And all her heart was as his harp, and rang  
Swift music, made of hope whose birthnote sprang  
Bright in the blood that kindled as he sang.

“Stars know not how we call them, nor may flowers  
Know by what happy name the hovering hours  
Baptize their new-born heads with dew and flame :  
And Love, adored of all time as of ours,  
Iseult, knew nought for ages of his name.

“ With many tongues men called on him, but he  
 Wist not which word of all might worthiest be  
 To sound for ever in his ear the same,  
 Till heart of man might hear and soul might see,  
 Iseult, the radiance ringing from thy name.

“ By many names men called him, as the night  
 By many a name calls many a starry light,  
 Her several sovereigns of divilual fame ;  
 But day by one name only calls aright,  
 Iseult, the sun that bids men praise his name.

“ In many a name of man his name soared high  
 And song shone round it soaring, till the sky  
 Rang rapture, and the world’s fast-founded frame  
 Trembled with sense of triumph, even as I,  
 Iseult, with sense of worship at thy name.

“ In many a name of woman smiled his power  
 Incarnate, as all summer in a flower,  
 Till winter bring forgetfulness or shame :  
 But thine, the keystone of his topless tower,  
 Iseult, is one with Love’s own lordliest name.

“ Iseult my love, Iseult my queen twice crowned,  
 In thee my death, in thee my life lies bound :  
 Names are there yet that all men’s hearts acclaim,  
 But Love’s own heart rings answer to the sound,  
 Iseult, that bids it bow before thy name.”

There ceased his voice yearning upon the word,  
 Struck with strong passion dumb : but she that  
 heard  
 Quailed to the heart, and trembled ere her eyes  
 Durst let the loving light within them rise,  
 And yearn on his for answer : yet at last,  
 Albeit not all her fear was overpast,

Hope, kindling even the frost of fear apace  
With sweet fleet bloom and breath of gradual grace,  
Flushed in the changing roses of her face.  
And ere the strife took truce of white with red,  
Or joy for soft shame's sake durst lift up head,  
Something she would and would not fain have said,  
And wist not what the fluttering word would be,  
But rose and reached forth to him her hand : and he,  
Heart-stricken, bowed his head and dropped his knee,  
And on her fragrant hand his lips were fire ;  
And their two hearts were as one trembling lyre  
Touched by the keen wind's kiss with brief desire  
And music shuddering at its own delight.  
So dawned the moonrise of their marriage night.

## IV

## THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

SPRING watched her last moon burn and fade with  
May

While the days deepened toward a bridal day.  
And on her snowbright hand the ring was set  
While in the maiden's ear the song's word yet  
Hovered, that hailed as love's own queen by name  
Iseult : and in her heart the word was flame ;  
A pulse of light, a breath of tender fire,  
Too dear for doubt, too driftless for desire.  
Between her father's hand and brother's led  
From hall to shrine, from shrine to marriage-bed,  
She saw not how by hap at home-coming  
Fell from her new lord's hand a royal ring,  
Whereon he looked, and felt the pulse astart  
Speak passion in his faith-forsaken heart.  
For this was given him of the hand wherein  
That heart's pledge lay for ever : so the sin  
That should be done if truly he should take  
This maid to wife for strange love's faithless sake  
Struck all his mounting spirit abashed, and fear  
Fell cold for shame's sake on his changing cheer.  
Yea, shame's own fire that burned upon his brow  
To bear the brand there of a broken vow

Was frozen again for very fear thereof  
That wrung his heart with keener pangs than love.  
And all things rose upon him, all things past  
Ere last they parted, cloven in twain at last,  
Iseult from Tristram, Tristram from the queen ;  
And how men found them in the wild woods green  
Sleeping, but sundered by the sword between,  
Dividing breast from amorous breast a span,  
But scarce in heart the woman from the man  
As far as hope from joy or sleep from truth,  
And Mark that saw them held for sacred sooth  
These were no fleshly lovers, by that sign  
That severed them, still slumbering ; so divine  
He deemed it : how at waking they beheld  
The king's folk round the king, and uncomelled  
Were fain to follow and fare among them home  
Back to the towers washed round with rolling foam  
And storied halls wherethrough sea-music rang :  
And how report thereafter swelled and sprang,  
A full-mouthed serpent, hissing in men's ears  
Word of their loves : and one of all his peers  
That most he trusted, being his kinsman born,  
A man base-moulded for the stamp of scorn,  
Whose heart with hate was keen and cold and dark,  
Gave note by midnight whisper to King Mark  
Where he might take them sleeping ; how ere day  
Had seen the grim next morning all away  
Fast bound they brought him down a weary way  
With forty knights about him, and their chief  
That traitor who for trust had given him grief,  
To the old hoar chapel, like a strait stone tomb  
Sheer on the sea-rocks, there to take his doom :  
How, seeing he needs must die, he bade them yet  
Bethink them if they durst for shame forget

What deeds for Cornwall had he done, and wrought  
For all their sake what rescue, when he fought  
Against the fierce foul Irish foe that came  
To take of them for tribute in their shame  
Three hundred heads of children ; whom in fight  
His hand redeeming slew Moraunt the knight  
That none durst lift his eyes against, not one  
Had heart but he, who now had help of none,  
To take the battle ; whence great shame it were  
To knighthood, yea, foul shame on all men there,  
To see him die so shamefully : nor durst  
One man look up, nor one make answer first,  
Save even the very traitor, who defied  
And would have slain him naked in his pride,  
But he, that saw the sword plucked forth to slay,  
Looked on his hands, and wrenched their bonds away,  
Haling those twain that he went bound between  
Suddenly to him, and kindling in his mien  
Shone lion-fashion forth with eyes alight,  
And lion-wise leapt on that kinsman knight  
And wrung forth of his felon hands with might  
The sword that should have slain him weaponless,  
And smote him sheer down : then came all the press  
All raging in upon him ; but he wrought  
So well for his deliverance as they fought  
That ten strong knights rejoicingly he slew,  
And took no wound, nor wearied : then the crew  
Waxed greater, and their cry on him ; but he  
Had won the chapel now above the sea  
That chafed right under : then the heart in him  
Sprang, seeing the low cliff clear to leap, and swim  
Right out by the old blithe way the sea-mew takes  
Across the bounding billow-belt that breaks  
For ever, but the loud bright chain it makes

To bind the bridal bosom of the land  
Time shall unlink not ever, till his hand  
Fall by its own last blow dead : thence again  
Might he win forth into the green great main  
Far on beyond, and there yield up his breath  
At least, with God's will, by no shameful death,  
Or haply save himself, and come anew  
Some long day later, ere sweet life were through.  
And as the sea-gull hovers high, and turns  
With eyes wherein the keen heart glittering yearns  
Down toward the sweet green sea whereon the broad  
noon burns,  
And suddenly, soul-stricken with delight,  
Drops, and the glad wave gladdens, and the light  
Sees wing and wave confuse their fluttering white,  
So Tristram one brief breathing-space apart  
Hung, and gazed down ; then with exulting heart  
Plunged : and the fleet foam round a joyous head  
Flashed, that shot under, and ere a shaft had sped  
Rose again radiant, a rejoicing star,  
And high along the water-ways afar  
Triumphed : and all they deemed he needs must  
die ;  
But Gouvernayle his squire, that watched hard by,  
Sought where perchance a man might win ashore,  
Striving, with strong limbs labouring long and sore,  
And there abode an hour : till as from fight  
Crowned with hard conquest won by mastering might,  
Hardly, but happier for the imperious toil,  
Swam the knight in forth of the close waves' coil,  
Sea-satiate, bruised with buffets of the brine,  
Laughing, and flushed as one afire with wine :  
All this came hard upon him in a breath ;  
And how he marvelled in his heart that death

Should be no bitterer than it seemed to be  
There, in the strenuous impulse of the sea  
Borne as to battle deathward : and at last  
How all his after seasons overpast  
Had brought him darkling to this dark sweet hour,  
Where his foot faltered nigh the bridal bower.  
And harder seemed the passage now to pass,  
Though smoother-seeming than the still sea's glass,  
More fit for very manhood's heart to fear,  
Than all straits past of peril. Hardly here  
Might aught of all things hearten him save one,  
Faith : and as men's eyes quail before the sun  
So quailed his heart before the star whose light  
Put out the torches of his bridal night,  
So quailed and shrank with sense of faith's keen star  
That burned as fire beheld by night afar  
Deep in the darkness of his dreams ; for all  
The bride-house now seemed hung with heavier pall  
Than clothes the house of mourning. Yet at last,  
Soul-sick with trembling at the heart, he passed  
Into the sweet light of the maiden bower  
Where lay the lonely lily-featured flower  
That, lying within his hand to gather, yet  
Might not be gathered of it. Fierce regret  
And bitter loyalty strove hard at strife  
With amorous pity toward the tender wife  
That wife indeed might never be, to wear  
The very crown of wedlock ; never bear  
Children, to watch and worship her white hair  
When time should change, with hand more soft than  
snow,  
The fashion of its glory ; never know  
The loveliness of laughing love that lives  
On little lips of children : all that gives

Glory and grace and reverence and delight  
To wedded woman by her bridal right,  
All praise and pride that flowers too fair to fall,  
Love that should give had stripped her of them all  
And left her bare for ever. So his thought  
Consumed him, as a fire within that wrought  
Visibly, ravening till its wrath were spent :  
So pale he stood, so bowed and passion-rent,  
Before the blithe-faced bride-folk, ere he went  
Within the chamber, heavy-eyed : and there  
Gleamed the white hands and glowed the glimmering  
    hair  
That might but move his memory more of one more  
    fair,  
More fair than all this beauty : but in sooth  
So fair she too shone in her flower of youth  
That scarcely might man's heart hold fast its  
    truth,  
Though strong, who gazed upon her : for her eyes  
Were emerald-soft as evening-coloured skies,  
And a smile in them like the light therein  
Slept, or shone out in joy that knew not sin,  
Clear as a child's own laughter : and her mouth,  
Albeit no rose full-hearted from the south  
And passion-coloured for the perfect kiss  
That signs the soul for love and stamps it his,  
Was soft and bright as any bud new-blown ;  
And through her cheek the gentler lifebloom shone  
Of mild wild roses nigh the northward sea.  
So in her bride-bed lay the bride : and he  
Drew nigh, and all the high sad heart in him  
Yearned on her, seeing the twilight meek and dim  
Through all the soft alcove tremblingly lit  
With hovering silver, as a heart in it

Beating, that burned from one deep lamp above,  
Fainter than fire of torches, as the love  
Within him fainter than a bridegroom's fire,  
No marriage-torch red with the heart's desire,  
But silver-soft, a flameless light that glowed  
Starlike along night's dark and starry road  
Wherein his soul was traveller. And he sighed,  
Seeing, and with eyes set sadly toward his bride  
Laid him down by her, and spake not : but within  
His heart spake, saying how sore should be the sin  
To break toward her, that of all womankind  
Was faithfulest, faith plighted, or unbind  
The bond first linked between them when they drank  
The love-draught : and his quick blood sprang and  
sank,  
Remembering in the pulse of all his veins  
That red swift rapture, all its fiery pains  
And all its fierier pleasures : and he spake  
Aloud, one burning word for love's keen sake—  
“ Iseult ; ” and full of love and lovelier fear  
A virgin voice gave answer—“ I am here.”  
And a pang rent his heart at root : but still,  
For spirit and flesh were vassals to his will,  
Strong faith held mastery on them : and the breath  
Felt on his face did not his will to death,  
Nor glance nor lute-like voice nor flower-soft touch  
Might so prevail upon it overmuch  
That constancy might less prevail than they,  
For all he looked and loved her as she lay  
Smiling ; and soft as bird alights on bough  
He kissed her maiden mouth and blameless brow,  
Once, and again his heart within him sighed :  
But all his young blood's yearning toward his bride,

How hard soe'er it held his life awake  
For passion, and sweet nature's unforbidden sake,  
And will that strove unwillingly with will it might not  
break,  
Fell silent as a wind abashed, whose breath  
Dies out of heaven, suddenly done to death,  
When in between them on the dumb dusk air  
Floated the bright shade of a face more fair  
Than hers that hard beside him shrank and smiled  
And wist of all no more than might a child.  
So had she all her heart's will, all she would,  
For love's sake that sufficed her, glad and good,  
All night safe sleeping in her maidenhood.

## ISEULT AT TINTAGEL.

BUT that same night in Cornwall oversea  
Couched at Queen Iseult's hand, against her knee,  
With keen kind eyes that read her whole heart's pain  
Fast at wide watch lay Tristram's hound Hodain,  
The goodliest and the mightiest born on earth,  
That many a forest day of fiery mirth  
Had plied his craft before them ; and the queen  
Cherished him, even for those dim years between,  
More than of old in those bright months far flown  
When ere a blast of Tristram's horn was blown  
Each morning as the woods rekindled, ere  
Day gat full empire of the glimmering air,  
Delight of dawn would quicken him, and fire  
Spring and pant in his breath with bright desire  
To be among the dewy ways on quest :  
But now perforce at restless-hearted rest  
He chafed through days more barren than the sand,  
Soothed hardly but soothed only with her hand,  
Though fain to fawn thereon and follow, still  
With all his heart and all his loving will  
Desiring one divided from his sight,  
For whose lost sake dawn was as dawn of night  
And noon as night's noon in his eyes was dark.  
But in the halls far under sat King Mark,

Feasting, and full of cheer, with heart uplift,  
As on the night that harper gat his gift :  
And music revelled on the fitful air,  
And songs came floated up the festal stair,  
And muffled roar of wassail, where the king  
Took heart from wine-cups and the quiring string  
Till all his cold thin veins rejoiced and ran  
Strong as with lifeblood of a kinglier man.  
But the queen shut from sound her wearied ears,  
Shut her sad eyes from sense of aught save tears,  
And wrung her hair with soft fierce hands, and  
prayed :

“ O God, God born of woman, of a maid,  
Christ, once in flesh of thine own fashion clad ;  
O very love, so glad in heaven and sad  
On earth for earth’s sake alway ; since thou art  
Pure only, I only impure of spirit and heart,  
Since thou for sin’s sake and the bitter doom  
Didst as a veil put on a virgin’s womb,  
I that am none, and cannot hear or see  
Or shadow or likeness or a sound of thee  
Far off, albeit with man’s own speech and face  
Thou shine yet and thou speak yet, showing forth  
grace—

Ah me ! grace only shed on souls that are  
Lit and led forth of shadow by thy star—  
Alas ! to these men only grace, to these,  
Lord, whom thy love draws Godward, to thy knees—  
I, can I draw thee me-ward, can I seek,  
Who love thee not, to love me ? seeing how weak,  
Lord, all this little love I bear thee is,  
And how much is my strong love more than this,  
My love that I love man with, that I bear  
Him sinning through me sinning ? wilt thou care,

God, for this love, if love be any, alas,  
In me to give thee, though long since there was,  
How long, when I too, Lord, was clean, even I,  
That now am unclean till the day I die—  
Haply by burning, harlot-fashion, made  
A horror in all hearts of wife and maid,  
Hateful, not knowing if ever in these mine eyes  
Shone any light of thine in any wise  
Or this were love at all that I bore thee ? ”

And the night spake, and thundered on the sea,  
Ravelling aloud for ruin of lives : and all  
The bastions of the main cliff's northward wall  
Rang response out from all their deepening length,  
As the east wind girded up his godlike strength  
And hurled in hard against that high-towered hold  
The fleeces of the flock that knows no fold,  
The rent white shreds of shattering storm : but she  
Heard not nor heeded wind or storming sea,  
Knew not if night were mild or mad with wind.

“ Yea, though deep lips and tender hair be thinned,  
Though cheek wither, brow fade, and bosom wane,  
Shall I change also from this heart again  
To maidenhood of heart and holiness ?  
Shall I more love thee, Lord, or love him less—  
Ah miserable ! though spirit and heart be rent,  
Shall I repent, Lord God ? shall I repent ?  
Nay, though thou slay me ! for herein I am blest,  
That as I loved him yet I love him best—  
More than mine own soul or thy love or thee,  
Though thy love save and my love save not me.  
Blest am I beyond women even herein,  
That beyond all born women is my sin,  
And perfect my transgression : that above  
All offerings of all others is my love,

Who have chosen it only, and put away for this  
 Thee, and my soul's hope, Saviour, of the kiss  
 Wherewith thy lips make welcome all thine own  
 When in them life and death are overthrown ;  
 The sinless lips that seal the death of sin,  
 The kiss wherewith their dumb lips touched begin  
 Singing in heaven.

“ Where we shall never, love,  
 Never stand up nor sing ! for God above  
 Knows us, how too much more than God to me  
 Thy sweet love is, my poor love is to thee !  
 Dear, dost thou see now, dost thou hear to-night,  
 Sleeping, my waste wild speech, my face worn  
 white,  
 —Speech once heard soft by thee, face once kissed  
 red !—

In such a dream as when men see their dead  
 And know not if they know if dead these be ?  
 Ah love, are thy days my days, and to thee  
 Are all nights like as my nights ? does the sun  
 Grieve thee ? art thou soul-sick till day be done,  
 And weary till day rises ? is thine heart  
 Full of dead things as mine is ? Nay, thou art  
 Man, with man's strength and praise and pride of  
 life,

No bondwoman, no queen, no loveless wife  
 That would be shamed albeit she had not sinned.”

And swordlike was the sound of the iron wind,  
 And as a breaking battle was the sea.

“ Nay, Lord, I pray thee let him love not me,  
 Love me not any more, nor like me die,  
 And be no more than such a thing as I.  
 Turn his heart from me, lest my love too lose  
 Thee as I lose thee, and his fair soul refuse

For my sake thy fair heaven, and as I fell  
Fall, and be mixed with my soul and with hell.  
Let me die rather, and only ; let me be  
Hated of him so he be loved of thee,  
Lord : for I would not have him with me there  
Out of thy light and love in the unlit air,  
Out of thy sight in the unseen hell where I  
Go gladly, going alone, so thou on high  
Lift up his soul and love him—Ah, Lord, Lord,  
Shalt thou love as I love him ? she that poured  
From the alabaster broken at thy feet  
An ointment very precious, not so sweet  
As that poured likewise forth before thee then  
From the rehallowed heart of Magdalen,  
From a heart broken, yearning like the dove,  
An ointment very precious which is love—  
Couldst thou being holy and God, and sinful she,  
Love her indeed as surely she loved thee ?  
Nay, but if not, then as we sinners can  
Let us love still in the old sad wise of man.  
For with less love than my love, having had  
Mine, though God love him he shall not be glad  
And with such love as my love, I wot well,  
He shall not lie disconsolate in hell :  
Sad only as souls for utter love's sake be  
Here, and a little sad, perchance, for me—  
Me happy, me more glad than God above,  
In the utmost hell whose fires consume not love !  
For in the waste ways emptied of the sun  
He would say—‘ Dear, thy place is void, and one  
Weeps among angels for thee, with his face  
Veiled, saying, *O sister, how thy chosen place  
Stands desolate, that God made fair for thee !*  
*Is heaven not sweeter, and we thy brethren, we*

*Fairer than love on earth and life in hell?*

And I—with me were all things then not well?  
Should I not answer—‘O love, be well content;  
Look on me, and behold if I repent.’

This were more to me than an angel’s wings.  
Yea, many men pray God for many things,  
But I pray that this only thing may be.”

And as a full field charging was the sea,  
And as the cry of slain men was the wind.

“ Yea, since I surely loved him, and he sinned  
Surely, though not as my sin his be black,  
God, give him to me—God, God, give him back !  
For now how should we live in twain or die ?  
I am he indeed, thou knowest, and he is I.  
Not man and woman several as we were,  
But one thing with one life and death to bear.  
How should one love his own soul overmuch ?  
And time is long since last I felt the touch,  
The sweet touch of my lover, hand and breath,  
In such delight as puts delight to death,  
Burn my soul through, till spirit and soul and sense,  
In the sharp grasp of the hour, with violence  
Died, and again through pangs of violent birth  
Lived, and laughed out with refluent might of mirth ;  
Laughed each on other and shuddered into one,  
As a cloud shuddering dies into the sun.  
Ah, sense is that or spirit, soul or flesh,  
That only love lulls or awakes afresh ?  
Ah, sweet is that or bitter, evil or good,  
That very love allays not as he would ?  
Nay, truth is this or vanity, that gives  
No love assurance when love dies or lives ?  
This that my spirit is wrung withal, and yet  
No surerlier knows if haply thine forget,

Thou that my spirit is wrung for, nor can say  
Love is not in thee dead as yesterday ?  
Dost thou feel, thou, this heartbeat whence my heart  
Would send thee word what life is mine apart,  
And know by keen response what life is thine ?  
Dost thou not hear one cry of all of mine ?  
O Tristram's heart, have I no part in thee ? "

And all her soul was as the breaking sea,  
And all her heart anhungered as the wind.

" Dost thou repent thee of the sin we sinned ?  
Dost thou repent thee of the days and nights  
That kindled and that quenched for us their lights,  
The months that feasted us with all their hours,  
The ways that breathed of us in all their flowers,  
The dells that sang of us with all their doves ?  
Dost thou repent thee of the wildwood loves ?  
Is thine heart changed, and hallowed ? art thou  
grown  
God's, and not mine ? Yet, though my heart make  
moan,

Fain would my soul give thanks for thine, if thou  
Be saved—yea, fain praise God, and knows not how.  
How should it know thanksgiving ? nay, or learn  
Aught of the love wherewith thine own should burn,  
God's, that should cast out as an evil thing  
Mine ? yea, what hand of prayer have I to cling,  
What heart to prophesy, what spirit of sight  
To strain insensual eyes toward increate light,  
Who look but back on life wherein I sinned ? "

And all their past came wailing in the wind,  
And all their future thundered in the sea.

" But if my soul might touch the time to be,  
If hand might handle now or eye behold  
My life and death ordained me from of old,

Life palpable, compact of blood and breath,  
Visible, present, naked, very death,  
Should I desire to know before the day  
These that I know not, nor is man that may ?  
For haply, seeing, my heart would break for fear,  
And my soul timeless cast its load off here,  
Its load of life too bitter, love too sweet,  
And fall down shamed and naked at thy feet,  
God, who wouldst take no pity of it, nor give  
One hour back, one of all its hours to live  
Clothed with my mortal body, that once more,  
Once, on this reach of barren beaten shore,  
This stormy strand of life, ere sail were set,  
Had haply felt love's arms about it yet—  
Yea, ere death's bark put off to seaward, might  
With many a grief have bought me one delight  
That then should know me never. Ah, what years  
Would I endure not, filled up full with tears,  
Bitter like blood and dark as dread of death,  
To win one amorous hour of mingling breath,  
One fire-eyed hour and sunnier than the sun,  
For all these nights and days like nights but one ?  
One hour of heaven born once, a stormless birth,  
For all these windy weary hours of earth ?  
One, but one hour from birth of joy to death,  
For all these hungering hours of feverish breath ?  
And I should lose this, having died and sinned."

And as man's anguish clamouring cried the wind,  
And as God's anger answering rang the sea.

" And yet what life—Lord God, what life for me  
Has thy strong wrath made ready ? Dost thou think  
How lips whose thirst hath only tears to drink  
Grow grey for grief untimely ? Dost thou know,  
O happy God, how men wax weary of woe—

Yea, for their wrong's sake that thine hand hath done  
 Come even to hate thy semblance in the sun ?  
 Turn back from dawn and noon and all thy light  
 To make their souls one with the soul of night ?  
 Christ, if thou hear yet or have eyes to see,  
 Thou that hadst pity, and hast no pity on me,  
 Know'st thou no more, as in this life's sharp span,  
 What pain thou hadst on earth, what pain hath man ?  
 Hast thou no care, that all we suffer yet ?  
 What help is ours of thee if thou forget ?  
 What profit have we though thy blood were given,  
 If we that sin bleed and be not forgiven ?  
 Not love but hate, thou bitter God and strange,  
 Whose heart as man's heart hath grown cold with  
     change,  
 Not love but hate thou showest us that have sinned."

And like a world's cry shuddering was the wind,  
 And like a God's voice threatening was the sea.

" Nay, Lord, for thou wast gracious ; nay, in thee  
 No change can come with time or varying fate,  
 No tongue bid thine be less compassionate,  
 No sterner eye rebuke for mercy thine,  
 No sin put out thy pity—no, not mine.  
 Thou knowest us, Lord, thou knowest us, all we are,  
 He, and the soul that hath his soul for star :  
 Thou knowest as I know, Lord, how much more  
     worth

Than all souls clad and clasped about with earth,  
 But most of all, God, how much more than I,  
 Is this man's soul that surely shall not die.  
 What righteousness, what judgment, Lord most  
     high,  
 Were this, to bend a brow of doom as grim  
 As threatens me, me the adulterous wife, on him ?

There lies none other nightly by his side :  
He hath not sought, he shall not seek a bride.  
Far as God sunders earth from heaven above,  
So far was my love born beneath his love.  
I loved him as the sea-wind loves the sea,  
To rend and ruin it only and waste : but he,  
As the sea loves a sea-bird loved he me,  
To foster and uphold my tired life's wing,  
And bounteously beneath me spread forth spring,  
A springtide space whereon to float or fly,  
A world of happy water, whence the sky  
Glowed goodlier, lightening from so glad a glass,  
Than with its own light only. Now, alas !  
Cloud hath come down and clothed it round with  
    storm,  
And gusts and fits of eddying winds deform  
The feature of its glory. Yet be thou,  
God, merciful : nay, show but justice now,  
And let the sin in him that scarce was his  
Stand expiated with exile : and be this  
The price for him, the atonement this, that I  
With all the sin upon me live, and die  
With all thy wrath on me that most have sinned."

    And like man's heart relenting sighed the wind,  
And as God's wrath subsiding sank the sea.

    “ But if such grace be possible—if it be  
Not sin more strange than all sins past, and worse  
Evil, that cries upon thee for a curse,  
To pray such prayers from such a heart, do thou  
Hear, and make wide thine hearing toward me now ;  
Let not my soul and his for ever dwell  
Sundered : though doom keep always heaven and hell  
Irreconcilable, infinitely apart,  
Keep not in twain for ever heart and heart

That once, albeit by not thy law, were one ;  
Let this be not thy will, that this be done.  
Let all else, all thou wilt of evil, be,  
But no doom, none, dividing him and me."

By this was heaven stirred eastward, and there came  
Up the rough ripple a labouring light like flame ;  
And dawn, sore trembling still and grey with fear,  
Looked hardly forth, a face of heavier cheer  
Than one which grief or dread yet half enshrouds,  
Wild-eyed and wan, across the cleaving clouds.  
And Iseult, worn with watch long held on pain,  
Turned, and her eye lit on the hound Hodain,  
And all her heart went out in tears : and he  
Laid his kind head along her bended knee,  
Till round his neck her arms went hard, and all  
The night past from her as a chain might fall :  
But yet the heart within her, half undone,  
Wailea, and was loth to let her see the sun.

And ere full day brought heaven and earth to  
flower,  
Far thence, a maiden in a marriage bower,  
That moment, hard by Tristram, oversea,  
Woke with glad eyes Iseult of Brittany.

## VI

## JOYOUS GARD

A LITTLE time, O Love, a little light,  
 A little hour for ease before the night.  
 Sweet Love, that art so bitter ; foolish Love,  
 Whom wise men know for wiser, and thy dove  
 More subtle than the serpent ; for thy sake  
 These pray thee for a little beam to break,  
 A little grace to help them, lest men think  
 Thy servants have but hours like tears to drink.  
 O Love, a little comfort, lest they fear  
 To serve as these have served thee who stand here.

For these are thine, thy servants these, that stand  
 Here nigh the limit of the wild north land,  
 At margin of the grey great eastern sea,  
 Dense-islanded with peaks and reefs, that see  
 No life but of the fleet wings fair and free  
 Which cleave the mist and sunlight all day long  
 With sleepless flight and cries more glad than song.  
 Strange ways of life have led them hither, here  
 To win fleet respite from desire and fear  
 With armistice from sorrow ; strange and sweet  
 Ways trodden by forlorn and casual feet  
 Till kindlier chance woke toward them kindly will  
 In happier hearts of lovers, and their ill

Found rest, as healing surely might it not,  
By gift and kingly grace of Launcelot  
At gracious bidding given of Guenevere.  
For in the trembling twilight of this year  
Ere April sprang from hope to certitude  
Two hearts of friends fast linked had fallen at feud  
As they rode forth on hawking, by the sign  
Which gave his new bride's brother Ganhardine  
To know the truth of Tristram's dealing, how  
Faith kept of him against his marriage vow  
Kept virginal his bride-bed night and morn ;  
Whereat, as wroth his blood should suffer scorn,  
Came Ganhardine to Tristram, saying, " Behold,  
We have loved thee, and for love we have shown of  
old

Scorn hast thou shown us : wherefore is thy bride  
Not thine indeed, a stranger at thy side,  
Contemned? what evil hath she done, to be  
Mocked with mouth-marriage and despised of thee,  
Shamed, set at nought, rejected ? " But there came  
On Tristram's brow and eye the shadow and flame  
Confused of wrath and wonder, ere he spake,  
Saying, " Hath she bid thee for thy sister's sake  
Plead with me, who believed of her in heart  
More nobly than to deem such piteous part  
Should find so fair a player ? or whence hast thou  
Of us this knowledge ? " " Nay," said he, " but now,  
Riding beneath these whitethorns overhead,  
There fell a flower into her girdlestead  
Which laughing she shook out, and smiling said—  
' Lo, what large leave the wind hath given this stray,  
To lie more near my heart than till this day  
Aught ever since my mother lulled me lay

Or even my lord came ever ; ' whence I wot  
We are all thy scorn, a race regarded not  
Nor held as worth communion of thine own,  
Except in her be found some fault alone  
To blemish our alliance." Then replied  
Tristram, " Nor blame nor scorn may touch my bride,  
Albeit unknown of love she live, and be  
Worth a man worthier than her love thought me.  
Faith only, faith withheld me, faith forbade  
The blameless grace wherewith love's grace makes  
glad

All lives linked else in wedlock ; not that less  
I loved the sweet light of her loveliness,  
But that my love toward faith was more : and thou,  
Albeit thine heart be keen against me now,  
Couldst thou behold my very lady, then  
No more of thee than of all other men  
Should this my faith be held a faithless fault."  
And ere that day their hawking came to halt,  
Being sore of him entreated for a sign,  
He sware to bring his brother Ganhardine  
To sight of that strange Iseult : and thereon  
Forth soon for Cornwall are these brethren gone,  
Even to that royal pleasance where the hunt  
Rang ever of old with Tristram s horn in front  
Blithe as the queen's horse bounded at his side :  
And first of all her dames forth pranced in pride  
That day before them, with a ringing rein  
All golden-glad, the king's false bride Brangwain,  
The queen's true handmaid ever : and on her  
Glancing, " Be called for all time truth-teller,  
O Tristram, of all true men's tongues alive,"  
Quoth Ganhardine ; " for may my soul so thrive

As yet mine eye drank never sight like this."

" Ay ? " Tristram said, " and she thou look'st on is  
So great in grace of goodliness, that thou  
Hast less thought left of wrath against me now,  
Seeing but my lady's handmaid ? Nay, behold ;  
See'st thou no light more golden than of gold  
Shine where she moves in midst of all, above  
All, past all price or praise or prayer of love ?  
Lo, this is she." But as one mazed with wine  
Stood, stunned in spirit and stricken, Ganhardine,  
And gazed out hard against them : and his heart  
As with a sword was cloven, and rent apart  
As with strong fangs of fire ; and scarce he spake,  
Saying how his life for even a handmaid's sake  
Was made a flame within him. And the knight  
Bade him, being known of none that stood in sight,  
Bear to Brangwain his ring, that she unseen  
Might give in token privily to the queen  
And send swift word where under moon or sun  
They twain might yet be no more twain but one.  
And that same night, under the stars that rolled  
Over their warm deep wildwood nights of old  
Whose hours for grains of sand shed sparks of fire,  
Such way was made anew for their desire  
By secret wile of sickness feigned, to keep  
The king far off her vigils or her sleep,  
That in the queen's pavilion midway set  
By glimmering moondawn were those lovers met,  
And Ganhardine of Brangwain gat him grace.  
And in some passionate soft interspace  
Between two swells of passion, when their lips  
Breathed, and made room for such brief speech as slips  
From tongues athirst with draughts of amorous wine  
That leaves them thirstier than the salt sea's brine,

Was counsel taken how to fly, and where  
Find covert from the wild world's ravening air  
That hunts with storm the feet of nights and days  
Through strange thwart lines of life and flowerless  
ways.

Then said Iseult : " Lo, now the chance is here  
Foreshown me late by word of Guenevere,  
To give me comfort of thy rumoured wrong,  
My traitor Tristram, when report was strong  
Of me forsaken and thine heart estranged :  
Nor should her sweet soul toward me yet be changed  
Nor all her love lie barren, if mine hand  
Crave harvest of it from the flowering land.  
See therefore if this counsel please thee not,  
That we take horse in haste for Camelot  
And seek that friendship of her plighted troth  
Which love shall be full fain to lend, nor loth  
Shall my love be to take it." So next night  
The multitudinous stars laughed round their flight,  
Fulfilling far with laughter made of light  
The encircling deeps of heaven : and in brief space  
At Camelot their long love gat them grace  
Of those fair twain whose heads men's praise im-  
pearled  
As love's two lordliest lovers in the world :  
And thence as guests for harbourage past they  
forth  
To win this noblest hold of all the north.  
Far by wild ways and many days they rode,  
Till clear across June's kingliest sunset glowed  
The great round girth of goodly wall that showed  
Where for one clear sweet season's length should be  
Their place of strength to rest in, fain and free,  
By the utmost margin of the loud lone sea.

And now, O Love, what comfort? God most high,

Whose life is as a flower's to live and die,

Whose light is everlasting: Lord, whose breath

Speaks music through the deathless lips of death

Whereto time's heart rings answer: Bard, whom time

Hears, and is vanquished with a wandering rhyme

That once thy lips made fragrant: Seer, whose sooth

Joy knows not well, but sorrow knows for truth,

Being priestess of thy soothsayings: Love, what grace

Shall these twain find at last before thy face?

This many a year they have served thee, and deserved,

If ever man might yet of all that served,

Since the first heartbeat bade the first man's knee

Bend, and his mouth take music, praising thee,

Some comfort; and some honey indeed of thine

Thou hast mixed for these with life's most bitter wine,

Commending to their passionate lips a draught

No deadlier than thy chosen of old have quaffed

And blessed thine hand, their cupbearer's: for not

On all men comes the grace that seals their lot

As holier in thy sight, for all these feuds

That rend it, than the light-souled multitude's,

Nor thwarted of thine hand nor blessed; but these

Shall see no twilight, Love, nor fade at ease,

Grey-grown and careless of desired delight,

But lie down tired and sleep before the night.

These shall not live till time or change may chill

Or doubt divide or shame subdue their will,

Or fear or slow repentance work them wrong,  
Or love die first : these shall not live so long.  
Death shall not take them drained of dear true life  
Already, sick or stagnant from the strife,  
Quenched : not with dry-drawn veins and lingering  
breath  
Shall these through crumbling hours crouch down to  
death.  
Swift, with one strong clean leap, ere life's pulse  
tire,  
Most like the leap of lions or of fire,  
Sheer death shall bound upon them : one pang past,  
The first keen sense of him shall be their last,  
Their last shall be no sense of any fear,  
More than their life had sense of anguish here.  
Weeks and light months had fled at swallow's  
speed  
Since here their first hour sowed for them the seed  
Of many sweet as rest or hope could be ;  
Since on the blown beach of a glad new sea  
Wherein strange rocks like fighting men stand  
scarred  
They saw the strength and help of Joyous Gard.  
Within the full deep glorious tower that stands  
Between the wild sea and the broad wild lands  
Love led and gave them quiet : and they drew  
Life like a God's life in each wind that blew,  
And took their rest, and triumphed. Day by day  
The mighty moorlands and the sea-walls grey,  
The brown bright waters of green fells that sing  
One song to rocks and flowers and birds on wing,  
Beheld the joy and glory that they had,  
Passing, and how the whole world made them  
glad,

And their great love was mixed with all things  
great,

As life being lovely, and yet being strong like fate.

For when the sun sprang on the sudden sea

Their eyes sprang eastward, and the day to be

Was lit in them untimely : such delight

They took yet of the clear cold breath and light

That goes before the morning, and such grace

Was deathless in them through their whole life's  
space

As dies in many with their dawn that dies

And leaves in pulseless hearts and flameless eyes

No light to lighten and no tear to weep

For youth's high joy that time has cast on sleep.

Yea, this old grace and height of joy they had,

To lose no jot of all that made them glad

And filled their springs of spirit with such fire

That all delight fed in them all desire ;

And no whit less than in their first keen prime

The spring's breath blew through all their summer  
time,

And in their skies would sunlike Love confuse

Clear April colours with hot August hues,

And in their hearts one light of sun and moon

Reigned, and the morning died not of the noon :

Such might of life was in them, and so high

Their heart of love rose higher than fate could fly.

And many a large delight of hawk and hound

The great glad land that knows no bourne or bound,

Save the wind's own and the outer sea-bank's, gave

Their days for comfort ; many a long blithe wave

Buoyed their blithe bark between the bare bald  
rocks,

Deep, steep, and still, save for the swift free flocks

Unshepherded, uncompassed, unconfined,  
That when blown foam keeps all the loud air blind  
Mix with the wind's their triumph, and partake  
The joy of blasts that ravin, waves that break,  
All round and all below their mustering wings,  
A clanging cloud that round the cliff's edge clings  
On each bleak bluff breaking the strenuous tides  
That rings reverberate mirth when storm bestrides  
The subject night in thunder : many a noon  
They took the moorland's or the bright sea's boon  
With all their hearts into their spirit of sense,  
Rejoicing, where the sudden dells grew dense  
With sharp thick flight of hills i e birds, or where  
On some strait rock's ledge in the intense mute air  
Erect against the cliff's sheer sunlit white  
Blue as the clear north heaven, clothed warm with  
light,  
Stood neck to bended neck and wing to wing  
With heads fast hidden under, close as cling  
Flowers on one flowering almond-branch in spring,  
Three herons deep asleep against the sun,  
Each with one bright foot downward poised, and  
one  
Wing-hidden hard by the bright head, and all  
Still as fair shapes fixed on some wondrous wall  
Of minster-aisle or cloister-close or hall  
To take even time's eye prisoner with delight.  
Or, satisfied with joy of sound and sight,  
They sat and communed of things past : what state  
King Arthur, yet unwarred upon by fate,  
Held high in hall at Camelot, like one  
Whose lordly life was as the mounting sun  
That climbs and pauses on the point of noon,  
Sovereign : how royal rang the tourney's tune

Through Tristram's three days' triumph, spear to  
spear,  
When Iseult shone enthroned by Guenevere,  
Rose against rose, the highest adored on earth,  
Imperial : yet with subtle notes of mirth  
Would she bemock her praises, and bemoan  
Her glory by that splendour overthrown  
Which lightened from her sister's eyes elate ;  
Saying how by night a little light seems great,  
But less than least of all things, very nought,  
When dawn undoes the web that darkness wrought ;  
How like a tower of ivory well designed  
By subtlest hand subserving subtlest mind,  
Ivory with flower of rose incarnadined  
And kindling with some God therein revealed,  
A light for grief to look on and be healed,  
Stood Guenevere : and all beholding her  
Were heartstruck even as earth at midsummer  
With burning wonder, hardly to be borne.  
So was that amorous glorious lady born,  
A fiery memory for all storied years :  
Nor might men call her sisters crowned her peers,  
Her sister queens, put all by her to scorn :  
She had such eyes as are not made to mourn ;  
But in her own a gleaming ghost of tears  
Shone, and their glance was slower than Guenevere's,  
And fitfuller with fancies grown of grief ;  
Shamed as a Mayflower shames an autumn leaf  
Full well she wist it could not choose but be  
If in that other's eyeshot standing she  
Should lift her looks up ever : wherewithal  
Like fires whose light fills heaven with festival  
Flamed her eyes full on Tristram's ; and he laughed  
Answering, " What wile of sweet child-hearted craft

That children forge for children, to beguile  
 Eyes known of them not witless of the wile  
 But fain to seem for sport's sake self-deceived,  
 Wilt thou find out now not to be believed ?  
 Or how shall I trust more than ouphe or elf  
 Thy truth to me-ward, who beliest thyself ? ”  
 “ Nor elf nor ouphe or aught of airier kind,”  
 Quoth she, “ though made of moonbeams moist and  
     blind,  
 Is light if weighed with man's winged weightless  
     mind.  
 Though thou keep somewise troth with me, God  
     wot,  
 When thou didst wed, I doubt, thou thoughtest not  
 So charily to keep it.” “ Nay,” said he,  
 “ Yet am not I rebukable by thee  
 As Launcelot, erring, held me ere he wist  
 No mouth save thine of mine was ever kissed  
 Save as a sister's only, since we twain  
 Drank first the draught assigned our lips to drain  
 That Fate and Love with darkling hands commixt  
 Poured, and no power to part them came betwixt,  
 But either's will, howbeit they seem at strife,  
 Was toward us one, as death itself and life  
 Are one sole doom toward all men, nor may one  
 Behold not darkness, who beholds the sun.”

“ Ah, then,” she said, “ what word is this men hear  
 Of Merlin, how some doom too strange to fear  
 Was cast but late about him oversea,  
 Sweet recreant, in thy bridal Brittany ?  
 Is not his life sealed fast on him with sleep,  
 By witchcraft of his own and love's, to keep  
 Till earth be fire and ashes ? ”

“ Surely,” said

Her lover, "not as one alive or dead  
The great good wizard, well beloved and well  
Predestinate of heaven that casts out hell  
For guerdon gentler far than all men's fate,  
Exempt alone of all predestinate,  
Takes his strange rest at heart of slumberland,  
More deep asleep in green Broceliande  
Than shipwrecked sleepers in the soft green sea  
Beneath the weight of wandering waves : but he  
Hath for those roofing waters overhead  
Above him always all the summer spread  
Or all the winter wailing : or the sweet  
Late leaves marked red with autumn's burning  
feet,  
Or withered with his weeping, round the seer  
Rain, and he sees not, nor may heed or hear  
The witness of the winter : but in spring  
He hears above him all the winds on wing  
Through the blue dawn between the brightening  
boughs,  
And on shut eyes and slumber-smitten brows  
Feels ambient change in the air and strengthening  
sun,  
And knows the soul that was his soul at one  
With the ardent world's, and in the spirit of earth  
His spirit of life reborn to mightier birth  
And mixed with things of elder life than ours ;  
With cries of birds, and kindling lamps of flowers,  
And sweep and song of winds, and fruitful light  
Of sunbeams, and the far faint breath of night,  
And waves and woods at morning : and in all,  
Soft as at noon the slow sea's rise and fall,  
He hears in spirit a song that none but he  
Hears from the mystic mouth of Nimue

Shed like a consecration ; and his heart,  
 Hearing, is made for love's sake as a part  
 Of that far singing, and the life thereof  
 Part of that life that feeds the world with love :  
 Yea, heart in heart is molten, hers and his,  
 Into the world's heart and the soul that is  
 Beyond or sense or vision ; and their breath  
 Stirs the soft springs of deathless life and death,  
 Death that bears life, and change that brings forth  
 seed  
 Of life to death and death to life indeed,  
 As blood recircling through the unsounded veins  
 Of earth and heaven with all their joys and pains.  
 Ah, that when love shall laugh no more nor weep  
 We too, we too might hear that song and sleep ! ”

“ Yea,” said Iseult, “ some joy it were to be  
 Lost in the sun's light and the all-girdling sea,  
 Mixed with the winds and woodlands, and to bear  
 Part in the large life of the quickening air,  
 And the sweet earth's, our mother : yet to pass  
 More fleet than mirrored faces from the glass  
 Out of all pain and all delight, so far  
 That love should seem but as the furthest star  
 Sunk deep in trembling heaven, scarce seen or  
 known,  
 As a dead moon forgotten, once that shone  
 Where now the sun shines—nay, not all things yet,  
 Not all things always, dying, would I forget.”

And Tristram answered amorously, and said :  
 “ O heart that here art mine, O heavenliest head  
 That ever took men's worship here, which art  
 Mine, how shall death put out the fire at heart,  
 Quench in men's eyes the head's remembered light,  
 That time shall set but higher in more men's sight ?

Think thou not much to die one earthly day,  
 Being made not in their mould who pass away  
 Nor who shall pass for ever."

"Ah," she said,

"What shall it profit me, being praised and dead?  
 What profit have the flowers of all men's praise?  
 What pleasure of our pleasure have the days  
 That pour on us delight of life and mirth?  
 What fruit of all our joy on earth has earth?  
 Nor am I—nay, my lover, am I one  
 To take such part in heaven's enkindling sun  
 And in the inviolate air and sacred sea  
 As clothes with grace that wondrous Nimue?  
 For all her works are bounties, all her deeds  
 Blessings; her days are scrolls wherein love  
 reads

The record of his mercies; heaven above  
 Hath not more heavenly holiness of love  
 Than earth beneath, wherever pass or pause  
 Her feet that move not save by love's own laws,  
 In gentleness of godlike wayfaring  
 To heal men's hearts as earth is healed by spring  
 Of all such woes as winter: what am I,  
 Love, that have strength but to desire and die,  
 That have but grace to love and do thee wrong,  
 What am I that my name should live so long,  
 Save as the star that crossed thy star-struck lot,  
 With hers whose light was life to Launcelot?  
 Life gave she him, and strength, and fame to be  
 For ever: I, what gift can I give thee?  
 Peril and sleepless watches, fearful breath  
 Of dread more bitter for my sake than death  
 When death came nigh to call me by my name,  
 Exile, rebuke, remorse, and—O, not shame.

Shame only, this I gave thee not, whom none  
May give that worst thing ever—no, not one.  
Of all that hate, all hateful hearts that see  
Darkness for light and hate where love should be,  
None for my shame's sake may speak shame of thee."

And Tristram answering ere he kissed her smiled :  
" O very woman, god at once and child,  
What ails thee to desire of me once more  
The assurance that thou hadst in heart before ?  
For all this wild sweet waste of sweet vain breath,  
Thou knowest I know thou hast given me life, not  
death.

The shadow of death, informed with shows of  
strife,

Was ere I won thee all I had of life.

Light war, light love, light living, dreams in sleep,  
Joy slight and light, not glad enough to weep,  
Filled up my foolish days with sound and shine,  
Vision and gleam from strange men's cast on mine,  
Reverberate light from eyes presaging thine  
That shed but shadowy moonlight where thy face  
Now sheds forth sunshine in the deep same place,  
The deep live heart half dead and shallower then  
Than summer fords which thwart not wandering  
men.

For how should I, signed sorrow's from my birth,  
Kiss dumb the loud red laughing lips of mirth ?  
Or how, sealed thine to be, love less than heaven on  
earth ?

My heart in me was held at restless rest,  
Presageful of some prize beyond its quest,  
Prophetic still with promise, fain to find the best.  
For one was fond and one was blithe and one  
Fairer than all save twain whose peers are none ;

For third on earth is none that heaven hath seen  
 To stand with Guenevere beside my queen.  
 Not Nimue, girt with blessing as a guard :  
 Not the soft lures and daughters of Ettarde :  
 Not she, that splendour girdled round with gloom,  
 Crowned as with iron darkness of the tomb,  
 And clothed with clouding conscience of a monstrous  
 doom,

Whose blind incestuous love brought forth a fire  
 To burn her ere it burn its darkling sire,  
 Her mother's son, King Arthur : yet but late  
 We saw pass by that fair live shadow of fate,  
 The queen Morgause of Orkney, like a dream  
 That scares the night when moon and starry beam  
 Sicken and swoon before some sorcerer's eyes  
 Whose wordless charms defile the saintly skies,  
 Bright still with fire and pulse of blood and breath,  
 Whom her own sons have doomed for shame to  
 death."

"Death—yea," quoth she, "there is not said or  
 heard

So oft aloud on earth so sure a word.  
 Death, and again death, and for each that saith  
 Ten tongues chime answer to the sound of death.  
 Good end God send us ever—so men pray.  
 But I—this end God send me, would I say,  
 To die not of division and a heart  
 Rent or with sword of severance cloven apart,  
 But only when thou diest and only where thou art,  
 O thou my soul and spirit and breath to me,  
 O light, life, love ! yea, let this only be,  
 That dying I may praise God who gave me thee,  
 Let hap what will thereafter."

So that day

They communed, even till even was worn away,  
Nor aught they said seemed strange or sad to say,  
But sweet as night's dim dawn to weariness.  
Nor loved they life or love for death's sake less,  
Nor feared they death for love's or life's sake more  
And on the sounding soft funereal shore  
They, watching till the day should wholly die,  
Saw the far sea sweep to the far grey sky,  
Saw the long sands sweep to the long grey sea.  
And night made one sweet mist of moor and lea,  
And only far off shore the foam gave light.  
And life in them sank silent as the night.

## VII

## THE WIFE'S VIGIL

BUT all that year in Brittany forlorn,  
More sick at heart with wrath than fear of scorn  
And less in love with love than grief, and less  
With grief than pride of spirit and bitterness,  
Till all the sweet life of her blood was changed  
And all her soul from all her past estranged  
And all her will with all itself at strife  
And all her mind at war with all her life,  
Dwelt the white-handed Iseult, maid and wife,  
A mourner that for mourning robes had on  
Anger and doubt and hate of things foregone.  
For that sweet spirit of old which made her sweet  
Was parched with blasts of thought as flowers with  
heat  
And withered as with wind of evil will ;  
Though slower than frosts or fires consume or kill  
That bleak black wind vexed all her spirit still.  
As ripples reddening in the roughening breath  
Of the eager east when dawn does night to death,  
So rose and stirred and kindled in her thought  
Fierce barren fluctuant fires that lit not aught,  
But scorched her soul with yearning keen as hate  
And dreams that left her wrath disconsolate.

When change came first on that first heaven where all  
Life's hours were flowers that dawn's light hand let  
fall,

The sun that smote her dewy cloud of days  
Wrought from its showery folds his rainbow's rays,  
For love the red, for hope the gentle green,  
But yellow jealousy glared pale between.  
Ere yet the sky grew heavier, and her head  
Bent flowerwise, chill with change and fancies fled,  
She saw but love arch all her heaven across with red,  
A burning bloom that seemed to breathe and beat  
And waver only as flame with rapturous heat  
Wavers ; and all the world therewith smelt sweet,  
As incense kindling from the rose-red flame :  
And when that full flush waned, and love became  
Scarce fainter, though his fading horoscope  
From certitude of sight receded, hope  
Held yet her April-coloured light aloft  
As though to lure back love, a lamp sublime and soft.  
But soon that light paled as a leaf grows pale  
And fluttered leaf-like in the gathering gale  
And melted even as dew-flakes, whose brief sheen  
The sun that gave despoils of glittering green ;  
Till harder shone 'twixt hope and love grown cold  
A sallow light like withering autumn's gold,  
The pale strong flame of jealous thought, that glows  
More deep than hope's green bloom or love's  
enkindled rose :  
As though the sunflower's faint fierce disk absorbed  
The spirit and heart of starrier flowers disorbed.  
That same full hour of twilight's doors unbarred  
To let bright night behold in Joyous Gard  
The glad grave eyes of lovers far away  
Watch with sweet thoughts of death the death of day

Saw lonelier by the narrower opening sea  
Sit fixed at watch Iseult of Brittany.  
As darkness from deep valleys void and bleak  
Climbs till it clothe with night the sunniest peak  
Where only of all a mystic mountain-land  
Day seems to cling yet with a trembling hand  
And yielding heart reluctant to recede,  
So, till her soul was clothed with night indeed,  
Rose the slow cloud of envious will within  
And hardening hate that held itself no sin,  
Veiled heads of vision, eyes of evil gleam,  
Dim thought on thought, and darkling dream on  
dream.

Far off she saw in spirit, and seeing abhorred,  
The likeness wrought on darkness of her lord  
Shine, and the imperial semblance at his side  
Whose shadow from her seat cast down the bride,  
Whose power and ghostly presence thrust her forth :  
Beside that unknown other sea far north  
She saw them, clearer than in present sight  
Rose on her eyes the starry shadow of night ;  
And on her heart that heaved with gathering fate  
Rose red with storm the starless shadow of hate ;  
And eyes and heart made one saw surge and swell  
The fires of sunset like the fires of hell.  
As though God's wrath would burn up sin with shame,  
The incensed red gold of deepening heaven grew  
flame :

The sweet green spaces of the soft low sky  
Faded, as fields that withering wind leaves dry :  
The sea's was like a doomsman's blasting breath  
From lips afoam with ravenous lust of death.  
A night like desolation, sombre-starred,  
Above the great walled girth of Joyous Gard

Spread forth its wide sad strength of shadow and  
gloom

Wherein those twain were compassed round with  
doom :

Hell from beneath called on them, and she heard  
Reverberate judgment in the wild wind's word  
Cry, till the sole sound of their names that rang  
Clove all the sea-mist with a clarion's clang,  
And clouds to clouds and flames to clustering flames.  
Beat back the dark noise of the direful names.  
Fear and strong exultation caught her breath,  
And triumph like the bitterness of death,  
And rapture like the rage of hate allayed  
With ruin and ravin that its might hath made ;  
And her heart swelled and strained itself to hear  
What may be heard of no man's hungering ear,  
And as a soil that cleaves in twain for drouth  
Thirsted for judgment given of God's own mouth  
Against them, till the strength of dark desire  
Was in her as a flame of hell's own fire.  
Nor seemed the wrath which held her spirit in stress  
Aught else or worse than passionate holiness,  
Nor the ardent hate which called on judgment's rod  
More hateful than the righteousness of God.

“ How long, till thou do justice, and my wrong  
Stand expiate ? O long-suffering judge, how long ?  
Shalt thou not put him in mine hand one day  
Whom I so loved, to spare not but to slay ?  
Shalt thou not cast her down for me to tread,  
Me, on the pale pride of her humbled head ?  
Do I not well, being angry ? doth not hell  
Require them ? yea, thou knowest that I do well.  
Is not thy seal there set of bloodred light  
For witness on the brows of day and night ?

Who shall unseal it? what shall melt away  
Thy signet from the doors of night and day?  
No man, nor strength of any spirit above,  
Nor prayer, nor ardours of adulterous love.  
Thou art God, the strong lord over body and soul:  
Hast thou not in the terrors of thy scroll  
All names of all men written as with fire?  
Thine only breath bids time and space respire:  
And are not all things evil in them done  
More clear in thine eyes than in ours the sun?  
Hast thou not sight stretched wide enough to see  
These that offend it, these at once and me?  
Is thine arm shortened or thine hand struck down  
As palsied? have thy brows not strength to frown?  
Are thine eyes blind with film of withering age?  
Burns not thine heart with righteousness of rage  
Yet, and the royal rancour toward thy foes  
Retributive of ruin? Time should close,  
Thou said'st, and earth fade as a leaf grows grey,  
Ere one word said of thine should pass away.  
Was this then not thy word, thou God most high,  
That sin shall surely bring forth death and die,  
Seeing how these twain live and have joy of life,  
His harlot and the man that made me wife?  
For is it I, perchance, I that have sinned?  
Me, peradventure, should thy wasting wind  
Smite, and thy sun blast, and thy storms devour  
Me with keen fangs of lightning? should thy power  
Put forth on me the weight of its awakening hour?  
Shall I that bear this burden bear that weight  
Of judgment? is my sin against thee great,  
If all my heart against them burn with all its hate?  
Thine, and not mine, should hate be? nay, but me  
They have spoiled and scoffed at, who can touch not  
thee.

Me, me, the fullness of their joy drains dry,  
Their fruitfulness makes barren : thou, not I,  
Lord, is it, whom their wrongdoing clothes with shame,  
That all who speak shoot tongues out at thy name  
As all who hear mock mine ? Make me thy sword  
At least, if even thou too be wronged, O Lord,  
At all of these that wrong me : make mine hand  
As lightning, or my tongue a fiery brand,  
To burn or smite them with thy wrath : behold,  
I have nought on earth save thee for hope or hold,  
Fail me not thou : I have nought but this to crave,  
Make me thy mean to give them to the grave,  
Thy sign that all men seeing may speak thee just,  
Thy word which turns the strengths of sin to dust,  
Thy blast which burns up towers and thrones with  
fire.

Lord, is this gift, this grace that I require,  
So great a gift, Lord, for thy grace to give  
And bid me bear thy part retributive ?  
That I whom scorn makes mouths at, I might be  
Thy witness if loud sin may mock at thee ?  
For lo, my life is as a barren ear  
Plucked from the sheaf : dark days drive past me here  
Downtrodden, while joy's reapers pile their sheaves,  
A thing more vile than autumn's weariest leaves,  
For these the sun filled once with sap of life.  
O thou my lord that hadst me to thy wife,  
Dost thou not fear at all, remembering me,  
The love that bowed my whole soul down to thee ?  
Is this so wholly nought for man to dread,  
Man, whose life walks between the quick and dead,  
Naked, and warred about with wind and sea,  
That one should love and hate as I do thee ?  
That one should live in all the world his foe  
So mortal as the hate that loves him so ?

Nought, is it nought, O husband, O my knight,  
O strong man and indomitable in fight,  
That one more weak than foam-bells on the sea  
Should have in heart such thoughts as I of thee ?  
Thou art bound about with stately strengths for  
bands :

What strength shall keep thee from my strengthless  
hands ?

Thou art girt about with goodly guards and great :  
What fosse may fence thee round as deep as hate ?  
Thou art wise : will wisdom teach thee fear of me ?  
Thou art great of heart : shall this deliver thee ?  
What wall so massive, or what tower so high,  
Shall be thy surety that thou shouldst not die,  
If that which comes against thee be but I ?  
Who shall rise up of power to take thy part,  
What skill find strength to save, what strength find  
art,

If that which wars against thee be my heart ?  
Not iron, nor the might of force afield,  
Nor edge of sword, nor sheltering weight of shield,  
Nor all thy fame since all thy praise began,  
Nor all the love and laud thou hast of man,  
Nor, though his noiseless hours with wool be shod,  
Shall God's love keep thee from the wrath of God.  
O son of sorrows, hast thou said at heart,  
Haply, God loves thee, God shall take thy part,  
Who hath all these years endured thee, since thy  
birth

From sorrow's womb bade sin be born on earth ?  
So long he hath cast his buckler over thee,  
Shall he not surely guard thee even from me ?  
Yea, but if yet he give thee while I live  
Into mine hands as he shall surely give,

Ere death at last bring darkness on thy face,  
Call then on him, call not on me for grace,  
Cast not away one prayer, one suppliant breath,  
On me that commune all this while with death.  
For I that was not and that was thy wife  
Desire not but one hour of all thy life  
Wherein to triumph till that hour be past ;  
But this mine hour I look for is thy last."

So mused she till the fire in sea and sky  
Sank, and the northwest wind spake harsh on high,  
And like the sea's heart waxed her heart that heard,  
Strong, dark, and bitter, till the keen wind's word  
Seemed of her own soul spoken, and the breath  
All round her not of darkness, but of death.

## VIII

## THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

ENOUGH of ease, O Love, enough of light,  
 Enough of rest before the shadow of night.  
 Strong Love, whom death finds feebler ; kingly Love,  
 Whom time discowns in season, seeing thy dove  
 Spell-stricken by the serpent ; for thy sake  
 These that saw light see night's dawn only break,  
 Night's cup filled up with slumber, whence men think  
 The draught more dread than thine was dire to drink.  
 O Love, thy day sets darkling : hope and fear  
 Fall from thee standing stern as death stands here.

For what have these to do with fear or hope  
 On whom the gates of outer darkness ope,  
 On whom the door of life's desire is barred ?  
 Past like a cloud, their days in Joyous Gard  
 Gleam like a cloud the westering sun stains red  
 Till all the blood of day's blithe heart be bled  
 And all night's heart requickened ; in their eyes  
 So flame and fade those far memorial skies,  
 So shines the moorland, so revives the sea,  
 Whereon they gazing mused of things to be  
 And wist not more of them than waters know  
 What wind with next day's change of tide shall  
 blow.

Dark roll the deepening days whose waves divide  
Unseasonably, with storm-struck change of tide,  
Tristram from Iseult : nor may sorrow say  
If better wind shall blow than yesterday  
With next day risen or any day to come.  
For ere the songs of summer's death fell dumb,  
And autumn bade the imperial moorlands change  
Their purples, and the bracken's bloom grow strange  
As hope's green blossom touched with time's harsh  
    rust,  
Was all their joy of life shaken to dust,  
And all its fire made ashes : by the strand  
Where late they strayed and communed hand from  
    hand  
For the last time fell separate, eyes of eyes  
Took for the last time leave, and saw the skies  
Dark with their deep division. The last time—  
The last that ever love's rekindling rhyme  
Should keep for them life's days and nights in tune  
With reflux of the morning and the moon  
Alternative in music, and make one  
The secrets of the stardawn and the sun  
For these twain souls ere darkness held them fast ;  
The last before the labour marked for last  
And toil of utmost knighthood, till the wage  
Of rest might crown his crowning pilgrimage  
Whereon forth faring must he take farewell,  
With spear for staff and sword for scallop-shell  
And scrip wherein close memory hoarded yet  
Things holier held than death might well forget ;  
The last time ere the travel were begun  
Whose goal is un beholden of the sun,  
The last wherewith love's eyes might yet be lit,  
Came, and they could but dream they knew not it.

For Tristram parting from her wist at heart  
How well she wist they might not choose but part,  
And he pass forth a pilgrim, when there came  
A sound of summons in the high king's name  
For succour toward his vassal Triamour,  
King in wild Wales, now spoiled of all his power,  
As Tristram's father ere his fair son's birth,  
By one the strongest of the sons of earth,  
Urgan, an iron bulk of giant mould :  
And Iseult in Tintagel as of old  
Sat crowned with state and sorrow : for her lord  
At Arthur's hand required her back restored,  
And willingly compelled against her will  
She yielded, saying within her own soul still  
Some season yet of soft or stormier breath  
Should haply give her life again or death :  
For now nor quick nor dead nor bright nor dark  
Were all her nights and days wherein King Mark  
Held haggard watch upon her, and his eyes  
Were cloudier than the gradual wintering skies  
That closed about the wan wild land and sea.  
And bitter toward him waxed her heart : but he  
Was rent in twain betwixt harsh love and hate  
With pain and passion half compassionate  
That yearned and laboured to be quit of shame,  
And could not : and his life grew smouldering flame,  
And hers a cloud full-charged with storm and  
shower,  
Though touched with trembling gleams of fire's bright  
flower  
That flashed and faded on its fitful verge,  
As hope would strive with darkness and emerge  
And sink, a swimmer strangled by the swallowing  
surge

But Tristram by dense hills and deepening vales  
Rode through the wild glad wastes of glorious  
Wales,

High-hearted with desire of happy fight  
And strong in soul with merrier sense of might  
Than since the fair first years that hailed him  
knight :

For all his will was toward the war, so long  
Had love repressed and wrought his glory wrong,  
So far the triumph and so fair the praise  
Seemed now that kindled all his April days.  
And here in bright blown autumn, while his life  
Was summer's yet for strength toward love or strife,  
Blithe waxed his hope toward battle, and high desire  
To pluck once more as out of circling fire  
Fame, the broad flower whose breath makes death  
more sweet

Than roses crushed by love's receding feet.  
But all the lovely land wherein he went  
The blast of ruin and ravenous war had rent ;  
And black with fire the fields where homesteads were,  
And foul with festering dead the high soft air,  
And loud with wail of women many a stream  
Whose own live song was like love's deepening  
dream,

Spake all against the spoiler : wherefore still  
Wrath waxed with pity, quickening all his will,  
In Tristram's heart for every league he rode  
Through the aching land so broad a curse bestrode  
With so supreme a shadow : till one dawn  
Above the green bloom of a gleaming lawn,  
High on the strait steep windy bridge that spanned  
A glen's deep mouth, he saw that shadow stand  
Visible, sword on thigh and mace in hand

Vast as the mid bulk of a roof-tree's beam.  
So, sheer above the wild wolf-haunted stream,  
Dire as the face disfeatured of a dream,  
Rose Urgan : and his eyes were night and flame ;  
But like the fiery dawn were his that came  
Against him, lit with more sublime desire  
Than lifts toward heaven the leaping heart of fire :  
And strong in vantage of his perilous place  
The huge high presence, red as earth's first race,  
Reared like a reed the might up of his mace,  
And smote : but lightly Tristram swerved, and  
drove

Right in on him, whose void stroke only clove  
Air, and fell wide, thundering athwart : and he  
Sent forth a stormier cry than wind or sea  
When midnight takes the tempest for her lord :  
And all the glen's throat seemed as hell's that  
roared ;  
But high like heaven's light over hell shone  
Tristram's sword,  
Falling, and bright as storm shows God's bare  
brand  
Flashed as it shore sheer off the huge right hand  
Whose strength was as the shadow of death on all  
that land.

And like the trunk of some grim tree sawn through  
Reeled Urgan, as his left hand grasped and drew  
A steel by sorcerers tempered : and anew  
Raged the red wind of fluctuant fight, till all  
The cliffs were thrilled as by the clangorous call  
Of storm's blown trumpets from the core of night,  
Charging : and even as with the storm-wind's might  
On Tristram's helm that sword crashed : and the  
knight

Fell, and his arms clashed, and a wide cry brake  
From those far off that heard it, for his sake  
Soul-stricken : and that bulk of monstrous birth  
Sent forth again a cry more dire for mirth :  
But ere the sunbright arms were soiled of earth  
They flashed again, re-risen : and swift and loud  
Rang the strokes out as from a circling cloud,  
So dense the dust wrought over them its drifted  
shroud.

Strong strokes, within the mist their battle made,  
Each hailed on other through the shifting shade  
That clung about them hurtling as the swift fight  
swayed :

And each between the jointed corslet saw  
Break forth his foe's bright blood at each grim flaw  
Steel made in hammered iron : till again  
The fiend put forth his might more strong for pain  
And cleft the great knight's glittering shield in  
twain,

Laughing for very wrath and thirst to kill,  
A beast's broad laugh of blind and wolfish will,  
And smote again ere Tristram's lips drew breath  
Panting, and swept as by the sense of death,  
That surely should have touched and sealed them  
fast

Save that the sheer stroke shrilled aside, and passed  
Frustate : but answering Tristram smote anew,  
And thrust the brute breast as with lightning through  
Clean with one cleaving stroke of perfect might :  
And violently the vast bulk leapt upright,  
And plunged over the bridge, and fell : and all  
The cliffs reverberate from his monstrous fall  
Rang : and the land by Tristram's grace was free.  
So with high laud and honour thence went he,

And southward set his sail again, and passed  
The lone land's ending, first beheld and last  
Of eyes that look on England from the sea :  
And his heart mourned within him, knowing how  
she  
Whose heart with his was fatefully made fast  
Sat now fast bound, as though some charm were  
cast  
About her, such a brief space eastward thence,  
And yet might soul not break the bonds of sense  
And bring her to him in very life and breath  
More than had this been even the sea of death  
That washed between them, and its wide sweet  
light  
The dim strait's darkness of the narrowing night  
That shuts about men dying whose souls put forth  
To pierce its passage through : but south and north  
Alike for him were other than they were :  
For all the northward coast shone smooth and fair,  
And off its iron cliffs the keen-edged air  
Blew summer, kindling from her mute bright mouth ;  
But winter breathed out of the murmuring south,  
Where, pale with wrathful watch on passing ships,  
The lone wife lay in wait with wan dumb lips.  
Yet, sailing where the shoreward ripple curled  
Of the most wild sweet waves in all the world,  
His soul took comfort even for joy to see  
The strong deep joy of living sun and sea,  
The large deep love of living sea and land,  
As past the lonely lion-guarded strand  
Where that huge warder lifts his couchant sides,  
Asleep, above the sleepless lapse of tides,  
The light sail swept, and past the unsounded caves  
Unsearchable, wherein the pulse of waves

Throbs through perpetual darkness to and fro,  
And the blind night swims heavily below  
While heavily the strong noon broods above,  
Even to the very bay whence very Love,  
Strong daughter of the giant gods who wrought  
Sun, earth, and sea out of their procreant thought,  
Most meetly might have risen, and most divine  
Beheld and heard things round her sound and shine  
From floors of foam and gold to walls of serpentine.  
For splendid as the limbs of that supreme  
Incarnate beauty through men's visions gleam,  
Whereof all fairest things are even but shadow or  
dream,  
And lovely like as Love's own heavenliest face,  
Gleams there and glows the presence and the grace  
Even of the mother of all, in perfect pride of place.  
For otherwhere beneath our world-wide sky  
There may not be beheld of men that die  
Aught else like this that dies not, nor may stress  
Of ages that bow down men's works make less  
The exultant awe that clothes with power its loveli-  
ness.  
For who sets eye thereon soever knows  
How since these rocks and waves first rolled and rose  
The marvel of their many-coloured might  
Hath borne this record sensible to sight,  
The witness and the symbol of their own delight,  
The gospel graven of life's most heavenly law,  
Joy, brooding on its own still soul with awe,  
A sense of godlike rest in godlike strife,  
The sovereign conscience of the spirit of life.  
Nor otherwhere on strand or mountain tower  
Hath such fair beauty shining forth in flower  
Put on the imperial robe of such imperious power.

For all the radiant rocks from depth to height  
Burn with vast bloom of glories blossom-bright  
As though the sun's own hand had thrilled them  
through with light  
And stained them through with splendour : yet from  
thence  
Such awe strikes rapture through the spirit of  
sense  
From all the inaccessible sea-wall's girth,  
That exultation, bright at heart as mirth,  
Bows deeper down before the beauty of earth  
Than fear may bow down ever : nor shall one  
Who meets at Alpine dawn the mounting sun  
On heights too high for many a wing to climb  
Be touched with sense of aught seen more sublime  
Than here smiles high and sweet in face of heaven  
and time.

For here the flower of fire, the soft hoar bloom  
Of springtide olive-woods, the warm green gloom  
Of clouded seas that swell and sound with dawn of  
doom,

The keen thwart lightning and the wan grey light  
Of stormy sunrise crossed and vexed with night,  
Flash, loom, and laugh with divers hues in one  
From all the curved cliff's face, till day be done,  
Against the sea's face and the gazing sun.  
And whensoever a strong wave, high in hope,  
Sweeps up some smooth slant breadth of stone  
aslope,  
That glowed with duskier fire of hues less bright,  
Swift as it sweeps back springs to sudden sight  
The splendour of the moist rock's fervent light,  
Fresh as from dew of birth when time was born  
Out of the world-conceiving womb of morn.

All its quenched flames and darkling hues divine  
Leap into lustrous life and laugh and shine  
And darken into swift and dim decline  
For one brief breath's space till the next wave run  
Right up, and ripple down again, undone,  
And leave it to be kissed and kindled of the sun.  
And all these things, bright as they shone before  
Man first set foot on earth or sail from shore,  
Rose not less radiant than the sun sees now  
When the autumn sea was cloven of Tristram's prow,  
And strong in sorrow and hope and woful will  
That hope might move not nor might sorrow kill  
He held his way back toward the wild sad shore  
Whence he should come to look on these no more,  
Nor ever, save with sunless eyes shut fast,  
Sail home to sleep in home-born earth at last.

And all these things fled fleet as light or breath  
Past, and his heart waxed cold and dull as death,  
Or swelled but as the tides of sorrow swell,  
To sink with sullen sense of slow farewell.  
So surely seemed the silence even to sigh  
Assurance of inveterate prophecy,  
“Thou shalt not come again home hither ere thou  
die.”

And the wind mourned and triumphed, and the sea  
Wailed and took heart and trembled ; nor might he  
Hear more of comfort in their speech, or see  
More certitude in all the waste world's range  
Than the only certitude of death and change.  
And as the sense and semblance fluctuated  
Of all things heard and seen alive or dead  
That smote far off upon his ears or eyes  
Or memory mixed with forecasts fain to rise  
And fancies faint as ghostliest prophecies,

So seemed his own soul, changefully forlorn,  
To shrink and triumph and mount up and mourn ;  
Yet all its fitful waters, clothed with night,  
Lost heart not wholly, lacked not wholly light,  
Seeing over life and death one star in sight  
Where evening's gates as fair as morning's ope,  
Whose name was memory, but whose flame was hope.  
For all the tides of thought that rose and sank  
Felt its fair strength wherefrom strong sorrow shrank  
A mightier trust than time could change or cloy,  
More strong than sorrow, more secure than joy.  
So came he, nor content nor all unblest,  
Back to the grey old land of Merlin's rest.

But ere six paces forth on shore he trod  
Before him stood a knight with feet unshod,  
And kneeling called upon him, as on God  
Might sick men call for pity, praying aloud  
With hands held up and head made bare and bowed ;  
“ Tristram, for God's love and thine own dear fame,  
I Tristram that am one with thee in name  
And one in heart with all that praise thee—I,  
Most woful man of all that may not die  
For heartbreak and the heavier scourge of shame,  
By all thy glory done our woful name  
Beseech thee, called of all men gentlest knight,  
Be now not slow to do my sorrows right.  
I charge thee for thy fame's sake through this land,  
I pray thee by thine own wife's fair white hand,  
Have pity of me whose love is borne away  
By one that makes of poor men's lives his prey,  
A felon masked with knighthood : at his side  
Seven brethren hath he night or day to ride  
With seven knights more that wait on all his will :  
And here at hand, ere yet one day fulfil

Its flight through light and darkness, shall they fare  
Forth, and my bride among them, whom they bear  
Through these wild lands his prisoner ; and if now  
I lose her, and my prayer be vain, and thou  
Less fain to serve love's servants than of yore,  
Then surely shall I see her face no more.  
But if thou wilt, for love's sake of the bride  
Who lay most loved of women at thy side,  
Strike with me, straight then hence behoves us ride  
And rest between the moorside and the sea  
Where we may smite them passing : but for me,  
Poor stranger, me not worthy scarce to touch  
Thy kind strong hand, how shouldst thou do so much ?  
For now lone left this long time waits thy wife  
And lacks her lord and light of wedded life  
Whilst thou far off art famous : yet thy fame,  
If thou take pity on me that bear thy name  
Unworthily, but by that name implore  
Thy grace, how shall not even thy fame grow more ?  
But be thy will as God's among us done,  
Who art far in fame above us as the sun :  
Yet only of him have all men help and grace."

And all the lordly light of Tristram's face  
Was softened as the sun's in kindly spring.  
" Nay, then may God send me as evil a thing  
When I give ear not to such prayers," he said,  
" And make my place among the nameless dead  
When I put back one hour the time to smite  
And do the unrighteous griefs of good men right.  
Behold, I will not enter in nor rest  
Here in mine own halls till this piteous quest  
Find end ere noon to-morrow : but do thou,  
Whose sister's face I may not look on now,  
Go, Ganhardine, with tiding of the vow

That bids me turn aside for one day's strife  
Or live dishonoured all my days of life,  
And greet for me in brother's wise my wife,  
And crave her pardon that for knighthood's sake  
And womanhood's, whose bands may no man break  
And keep the bands of bounden honour fast,  
I seek not her till two nights yet be past  
And this my quest accomplished, so God please  
By me to give this young man's anguish ease  
And on his wrongdoer's head his wrong requite."

And Tristram with that woful thankful knight  
Rode by the seaside moorland wastes away  
Between the quickening night and darkening day  
Ere half the gathering stars had heart to shine.  
And lightly toward his sister Ganhardine  
Sped, where she sat and gazed alone afar  
Above the grey sea for the sunset star,  
And lightly kissed her hand and lightly spake  
His tiding of that quest for knighthood's sake.  
And the white-handed Iseult, bowing her head,  
Gleamed on him with a glance athwart, and said,  
" As God's on earth and far above the sun,  
So toward his handmaid be my lord's will done."  
And doubts too dim to question or divine  
Touched as with shade the spirit of Ganhardine,  
Hearing ; and scarce for half a doubtful breath  
His bright light heart held half a thought of death  
And knew not whence this darkling thought might be,  
But surely not his sister's work : for she  
Was ever sweet and good as summer air,  
And soft as dew when all the night is fair,  
And gracious as the golden maiden moon  
When darkness craves her blessing : so full soon

His mind was light again as leaping waves,  
Nor dreamed that hers was like a field of graves  
Where no man's foot dares swerve to left or right,  
Nor ear dares hearken, nor dares eye take sight  
Of aught that moves and murmurs there at night.

But by the sea-banks where at morn their foes  
Might find them, lay those knightly name-fellows,  
One sick with grief of heart and sleepless, one  
With heart of hope triumphant as the sun  
Dreaming asleep of love and fame and fight:  
But sleep at last wrapped warm the wan young  
knight;

And Tristram with the first pale windy light  
Woke ere the sun spake summons, and his ear  
Caught the sea's call that fired his heart to hear,  
A noise of waking waters : for till dawn  
The sea was silent as a mountain lawn  
When the wind speaks not, and the pines are dumb,  
And summer takes her fill ere autumn come  
Of life more soft than slumber : but ere day  
Rose, and the first beam smote the bounding bay,  
Up sprang the strength of the dark East, and took  
With its wide wings the waters as they shook,  
And hurled them huddling on aheap, and cast  
The full sea shoreward with a great glad blast,  
Blown from the heart of morning : and with joy  
Full-souled and perfect passion, as a boy  
That leaps up light to wrestle with the sea  
For pure heart's gladness and large ecstasy,  
Up sprang the might of Tristram ; and his soul  
Yearned for delight within him, and waxed whole  
As a young child's with rapture of the hour  
That brought his spirit and all the world to flower,

And all the bright blood in his veins beat time  
To the wind's clarion and the water's chime  
That called him and he followed it and stood  
On the sand's verge before the grey great flood  
Where the white hurtling heads of waves that met  
Rose unsaluted of the sunrise yet.

And from his heart's root outward shot the sweet  
Strong joy that thrilled him to the hands and feet,  
Filling his limbs with pleasure and glad might,  
And his soul drank the immeasurable delight  
That earth drinks in with morning, and the free  
Limitless love that lifts the stirring sea  
When on her bare bright bosom as a bride  
She takes the young sun, perfect in his pride,  
Home to his place with passion : and the heart  
Trembled for joy within the man whose part  
Was here not least in living ; and his mind  
Was rapt abroad beyond man's meaner kind  
And pierced with love of all things and with mirth  
Moved to make one with heaven and heavenlike earth  
And with the light live water. So awhile  
He watched the dim sea with a deepening smile,  
And felt the sound and savour and swift flight  
Of waves that fled beneath the fading night  
And died before the darkness, like a song  
With harps between and trumpets blown along  
Through the loud air of some triumphant day,  
Sink through his spirit and purge all sense away  
Save of the glorious gladness of his hour  
And all the world about to break in flower  
Before the sovereign laughter of the sun ;  
And he, ere night's wide work lay all undone,  
As earth from her bright body casts off night,  
Cast off his raiment for a rapturous fight

And stood between the sea's edge and the sea  
Naked, and godlike of his mould as he  
Whose swift foot's sound shook all the towers of  
Troy ;

So clothed with might, so girt upon with joy  
As, ere the knife had shorn to feed the fire  
His glorious hair before the unkindled pyre  
Whereon the half of his great heart was laid,  
Stood, in the light of his live limbs arrayed,  
Child of heroic earth and heavenly sea,  
The flower of all men : scarce less bright than he,  
If any of all men latter-born might stand,  
Stood Tristram, silent, on the glimmering strand.  
Not long : but with a cry of love that rang  
As from a trumpet golden-mouthed, he sprang,  
As toward a mother's where his head might rest  
Her child rejoicing, toward the strong sea's breast  
That none may gird nor measure : and his heart  
Sent forth a shout that bade his lips not part,  
But triumphed in him silent : no man's voice,  
No song, no sound of clarions that rejoice,  
Can set that glory forth which fills with fire  
The body and soul that have their whole desire  
Silent, and freer than birds or dreams are free  
Take all their will of all the encountering sea.  
And toward the foam he bent and forward smote,  
Laughing, and launched his body like a boat  
Full to the sea-breath, and against the tide  
Struck strongly forth with amorous arms made  
wide  
To take the bright breast of the wave to his  
And on his lips the sharp sweet minute's kiss  
Given of the wave's lip for a breath's space curled  
And pure as at the daydawn of the world.

And round him all the bright rough shuddering sea  
Kindled, as though the world were even as he,  
Heart-stung with exultation of desire :  
And all the life that moved him seemed to aspire,  
As all the sea's life toward the sun : and still  
Delight within him waxed with quickening will  
More smooth and strong and perfect as a flame  
That springs and spreads, till each glad limb became  
A note of rapture in the tune of life,  
Live music mild and keen as sleep and strife :  
Till the sweet change that bids the sense grow sure  
Of deeper depth and purity more pure  
Wrapped him and lapped him round with clearer cold,  
And all the rippling green grew royal gold  
Between him and the far sun's rising rim.  
And like the sun his heart rejoiced in him,  
And brightened with a broadening flame of mirth :  
And hardly seemed its life a part of earth,  
But the life kindled of a fiery birth  
And passion of a new-begotten son  
Between the live sea and the living sun.  
And mightier grew the joy to meet full-faced  
Each wave, and mount with upward plunge, and taste  
The rapture of its rolling strength, and cross  
Its flickering crown of snows that flash and toss  
Like plumes in battle's blithest charge, and thence  
To match the next with yet more strenuous sense ;  
Till on his eyes the light beat hard and bade  
His face turn west and shoreward through the glad  
Swift revel of the waters golden-clad,  
And back with light reluctant heart he bore  
Across the broad-backed rollers in to shore ;  
Strong-spirited for the chance and cheer of fight,  
And donned his arms again, and felt the might

In all his limbs rejoice for strength, and praised  
God for such life as that whereon he gazed,  
And wist not surely its joy was even as fleet  
As that which laughed and lapsed against his feet,  
The bright thin grey foam-blossom, glad and hoar,  
That flings its flower along the flowerless shore  
On sand or shingle, and still with sweet strange snows,  
As where one great white storm-dishevelled rose  
May rain her wild leaves on a windy land,  
Strews for long leagues the sounding slope of strand,  
And flower on flower falls flashing, and anew  
A fresh light leaps up whence the last flash flew,  
And casts its brief glad gleam of life away  
To fade not flowerwise but as drops the day  
Storm-smitten, when at once the dark devours  
Heaven and the sea and earth with all their flowers ;  
No star in heaven, on earth no rose to see,  
But the white blown brief blossoms of the sea,  
That make her green gloom starrier than the sky,  
Dance yet before the tempest's tune, and die.  
And all these things he glanced upon, and knew  
How fair they shone, from earth's least flake of dew  
To stretch of seas and imminence of skies,  
Unwittingly, with unpresageful eyes,  
For the last time. The world's half heavenly face,  
The music of the silence of the place,  
The confluence and the reflux of the sea,  
The wind's note ringing over wold and lea,  
Smote once more through him keen as fire that smote,  
Rang once more through him one reverberate note,  
That faded as he turned again and went,  
Fulfilled by strenuous joy with strong content,  
To take his last delight of labour done  
That yet should be beholden of the sun

Or ever give man comfort of his hand.

Beside a wood's edge in the broken land  
An hour at wait the twain together stood,  
Till swift between the moorside and the wood  
Flashed the spears forward of the coming train ;  
And seeing beside the strong chief spoiler's rein  
His wan love riding prisoner in the crew,  
Forth with a cry the young man leapt, and flew  
Right on that felon sudden as a flame ;  
And hard at hand the mightier Tristram came,  
Bright as the sun and terrible as fire :  
And there had sword and spear their soul's desire,  
And blood that quenched the spear's thirst as it poured  
Slaked royally the hunger of the sword,  
Till the fierce heart of steel could scarce fulfil  
Its greed and ravin of insatiate will.  
For three the fiery spear of Tristram drove  
Down ere a point of theirs his harness clove  
Or its own sheer mid shaft splintered in twain ;  
And his heart bounded in him, and was fain  
As fire or wind that takes its fill by night  
Of tempest and of triumph : so the knight  
Rejoiced and ranged among them, great of hand,  
Till seven lay slain upon the heathery sand  
Or in the dense breadth of the woodside fern.  
Nor did his heart not mightier in him burn  
Seeing at his hand that young knight fallen, and high  
The red sword reared again that bade him die.  
But on the slayer exulting like the flame  
Whose foot foreshines the thunder Tristram came  
Raging, for piteous wrath had made him fire ;  
And as a lion's look his face was dire  
That flashed against his foeman ere the sword  
Lightened and wrought the heart's will of its lord,

And clove through casque and crown the wrongdoer's head.

And right and left about their dark chief dead  
Hurtled and hurled those felons to and fro,  
Till as a storm-wind scatters leaves and snow  
His right hand ravening scattered them ; but one  
That fled with sidelong glance athwart the sun  
Shot, and the shaft flew sure, and smote aright,  
Full in the wound's print of his great first fight  
When at his young strength's peril he made free  
Cornwall, and slew beside its bordering sea  
The fair land's foe, who yielding up his breath  
Yet left him wounded nigh to dark slow death.  
And hardly with long toil thence he won home  
Between the grey moor and the glimmering foam,  
And halting fared through his own gate, and fell,  
Thirsting : for as the sleepless fire of hell  
The fire within him of his wound again  
Burned, and his face was dark as death for pain,  
And blind the blithe light of his eyes : but they  
Within that watched and wist not of the fray  
Came forth and cried aloud on him for woe.  
And scarce aloud his thanks fell faint and slow  
As men reared up the strong man fallen and bore  
Down the deep hall that looked along the shore,  
And laid him soft abed, and sought in vain  
If herb or hand of leech might heal his pain.  
And the white-handed Iseult hearkening heard  
All, and drew nigh, and spake no wifely word,  
But gazed upon him doubtfully, with eyes  
Clouded ; and he in kindly knightly wise  
Spake with scant breath, and smiling : " Surely this  
Is penance for discourteous lips to kiss

And feel the brand burn through them, here to lie  
And lack the strength here to do more than sigh  
And hope not hence for pardon." Then she bowed  
Her head, still silent as a stooping cloud,  
And laid her lips against his face ; and he  
Felt sink a shadow across him as the sea  
Might feel a cloud stoop toward it : and his heart  
Darkened as one that wastes by sorcerous art  
And knows not whence it withers : and he turned  
Back from her emerald eyes his own, and yearned  
All night for eyes all golden : and the dark  
Hung sleepless round him till the loud first lark  
Rang record forth once more of darkness done,  
And all things born took comfort from the sun.

## IX

## THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

FATE, that was born ere spirit and flesh were made,  
The fire that fills man's life with light and shade ;  
The power beyond all godhead which puts on  
All forms of multitudinous unison,  
A raiment of eternal change inwrought  
With shapes and hues more subtly spun than thought,  
Where all things old bear fruit of all things new  
And one deep chord throbs all the music through,  
The chord of change unchanging, shadow and light  
Inseparable as reverberate day from night ;  
Fate, that of all things save the soul of man  
Is lord and God since body and soul began ;  
Fate, that keeps all the tune of things in chime ;  
Fate, that breathes power upon the lips of time ;  
That smites and soothes with heavy and healing hand  
All joys and sorrows born in life's dim land,  
Till joy be found a shadow and sorrow a breath  
And life no discord in the tune with death,  
But all things fain alike to die and live  
In pulse and lapse of tides alternative,  
Through silence and through sound of peace and strife,  
Till birth and death be one in sight of life ;  
Fate, heard and seen of no man's eyes or ears,  
To no man shown through light of smiles or tears,

And moved of no man's prayer to fold its wings ;  
Fate, that is night and light on worldly things ;  
Fate, that is fire to burn and sea to drown,  
Strength to build up and thunder to cast down ;  
Fate, shield and screen for each man's lifelong head,  
And sword at last or dart that strikes it dead ;  
Fate, higher than heaven and deeper than the grave,  
That saves and spares not, spares and doth not save ;  
Fate, that in gods' wise is not bought and sold  
For prayer or price of penitence or gold ;  
Whose law shall live when life bids earth farewell,  
Whose justice hath for shadows heaven and hell .  
Whose judgment into no god's hand is given,  
Nor is its doom not more than hell or heaven :  
Fate, that is pure of love and clean of hate,  
Being equal-eyed as nought may be but fate ;  
Through many and weary days of foiled desire  
Leads life to rest where tears no more take fire ;  
Through many and weary dreams of quenched delight  
Leads life through death past sense of day and night.

Nor shall they feel or fear, whose date is done,  
Aught that made once more dark the living sun  
And bitterer in their breathing lips the breath  
Than the dark dawn and bitter dust of death.  
For all the light, with fragrance as of flowers,  
That clothes the lithe live limbs of separate hours,  
More sweet to savour and more clear to sight  
Dawns on the soul death's undivided night.  
No vigils has that perfect night to keep,  
No fever-fits of vision shake that sleep.  
Nor if they wake, and any place there be  
Wherein the soul may feel her wings beat free  
Through air too clear and still for sound or strife  
If life were haply death, and death be life ;

If love with yet some lovelier laugh revive,  
And song relume the light it bore alive,  
And friendship, found of all earth's gifts most good,  
Stand perfect in perpetual brotherhood ;  
If aught indeed at all of all this be,  
Though none might say nor any man might see,  
Might he that sees the shade thereof not say  
This dream were trustier than the truth of day.  
Nor haply may not hope, with heart more clear,  
Burn deathward, and the doubtful soul take cheer,  
Seeing through the channelled darkness yearn a  
star

Whose eyebeams are not as the morning's are,  
Transient, and subjugate of lordlier light,  
But all unconquerable by noon or night,  
Being kindled only of life's own inmost fire,  
Truth, stablished and made sure by strong desire.  
Fountain of all things living, source and seed,  
Force that perforce transfigures dream to deed  
God that begets on time, the body of death,  
Eternity : nor may man's darkening breath,  
Albeit it stain, disfigure or destroy  
The glass wherein the soul sees life and joy  
Only, with strength renewed and spirit of youth,  
And brighter than the sun's the body of Truth  
Eternal, unimaginable of man,  
Whose very face not Thought's own eyes may scan,  
But see far off his radiant feet at least,  
Trampling the head of Fear, the false high priest,  
Whose broken chalice foams with blood no more,  
And prostrate on that high priest's chancel floor,  
Bruised, overthrown, blind, maimed, with bloodless  
rod,  
The miscreation of his miscreant God.

That sovereign shadow cast of souls that dwell  
In darkness and the prison-house of hell  
Whose walls are built of deadly dread, and bound  
The gates thereof with dreams as iron round,  
And all the bars therein and stanchions wrought  
Of shadow forged like steel and tempered thought  
And words like swords and thunder-clouded creeds  
And faiths more dire than sin's most direful deeds :  
That shade accursed and worshipped, which hath  
made

The soul of man that brought it forth a shade  
Black as the womb of darkness, void and vain,  
A throne for fear, a pasturage for pain,  
Impotent, abject, clothed upon with lies,  
A foul blind fume of words and prayers that rise,  
Aghast and harsh, abhorrent and abhorred,  
Fierce as its God, blood-saturate as its Lord ;  
With loves and mercies on its lips that hiss  
Comfort, and kill compassion with a kiss,  
And strike the world black with their blasting breath ;  
That ghost whose core of life is very death  
And all its light of heaven a shadow of hell,  
Fades, falls, wanes, withers by none other spell  
But theirs whose eyes and ears have seen and heard  
Not the face naked, not the perfect word,  
But the bright sound and feature felt from far  
Of life which feeds the spirit and the star,  
Thrills the live light of all the suns that roll,  
And stirs the still sealed springs of every soul.

Three dim days through, three slumberless nights  
long,

Perplexed at dawn, oppressed at evensong,  
The strong man's soul now sealed indeed with pain,  
And all its springs half dried with drought, had lain

Prisoner within the fleshly dungeon-dress  
Sore chafed and wasted with its weariness.  
And fain it would have found the star, and fain  
Made this funereal prison-house of pain  
A watch-tower whence its eyes might sweep, and see  
If any place for any hope might be  
Beyond the hells and heavens of sleep and strife,  
Or any light at all of any life  
Beyond the dense false darkness woven above,  
And could not, lacking grace to look on love,  
And in the third night's dying hour he spake,  
Seeing scarce the seals that bound the dayspring  
break  
And scarce the daystar burn above the sea :  
“ O Ganhardine, my brother true to me,  
I charge thee by those nights and days we knew  
No great while since in England, by the dew  
That bathed those nights with blessing, and the fire  
That thrilled those days as music thrills a lyre,  
Do now for me perchance the last good deed  
That ever love may crave or life may need  
Ere love lay life in ashes : take to thee  
My ship that shows aloft against the sea  
Carved on her stem the semblance of a swan,  
And ere the waves at even again wax wan  
Pass, if it may be, to my lady's land,  
And give this ring into her secret hand,  
And bid her think how hard on death I lie,  
And fain would look upon her face and die.  
But as a merchant's laden be the bark  
With royal ware for fraughtage, that King Mark  
May take for toll thereof some costly thing ;  
And when this gift finds grace before the king,  
Choose forth a cup, and put therein my ring

Where sureliest only of one it may be seen,  
And bid her handmaid bear it to the queen  
For earnest of thine homage : then shall she  
Fear, and take counsel privily with thee,  
To know what errand there is thine from me  
And what my need in secret of her sight.  
But make thee two sails, one like sea-foam white  
To spread for signal if thou bring her back,  
And if she come not see the sail be black,  
That I may know or ever thou take land  
If these my lips may die upon her hand  
Or hers may never more be mixed with mine."

And his heart quailed for grief in Ganhardine,  
Hearing ; and all his brother bade he swore  
Surely to do, and straight fare forth from shore.  
But the white-handed Iseult hearkening heard  
All, and her heart waxed hot, and every word  
Thereon seemed graven and printed in her thought  
As lines with fire and molten iron wrought.  
And hard within her heavy heart she cursed  
Both, and her life was turned to fiery thirst,  
And all her soul was hunger, and its breath  
Of hope and life a blast of raging death.  
For only in hope of evil was her life.  
So bitter burned within the unchilled wife  
A virgin lust for vengeance, and such hate  
Wrought in her now the fervent work of fate.

Then with a south-west wind the Swan set forth,  
And over wintering waters bore to north,  
And round the wild land's windy westward end  
Up the blown channel bade her bright way bend  
East on toward high Tintagel : where at dark  
Landing, fair welcome found they of King Mark,

And Ganhardine with Brangwain as of old  
Spake, and she took the cup of chiselled gold  
Wherein lay secret Tristram's trothplight ring,  
And bare it unbeholden of the king  
Even to her lady's hand, which hardly took  
A gift whereon a queen's eyes well might look,  
With grace forlorn of weary gentleness.  
But, seeing, her life leapt in her, keen to guess  
The secret of the symbol: and her face  
Flashed bright with blood whence all its grief-worn  
    grace  
Took fire and kindled to the quivering hair.  
And in the dark soft hour of starriest air  
Thrilled through with sense of midnight, when the  
    world  
Feels the wide wings of sleep about it furled,  
Down stole the queen, deep-muffled to her war  
Mute restless lips, and came where yet the Swan  
Swung fast at anchor: whence by starlight she  
Hoised snowbright sails, and took the glimmering  
    sea.

But all the long night long more keen and sore  
His wound's grief waxed in Tristram evermore,  
And heavier always hung his heart asway  
Between dim fear and clouded hope of day.  
And still with face and heart at silent strife  
Beside him watched the maiden called his wife,  
Patient, and spake not save when scarce he spake,  
Murmuring with sense distraught and spirit awake  
Speech bitterer than the words thereof were sweet:  
And hatred thrilled her to the hands and feet,  
Listening: for alway back reiterate came  
The passionate faint burden of her name.

Nor ever through the labouring lips astir  
Came any word of any thought of her.  
But the soul wandering struggled and clung hard  
Only to dreams of joy in Joyous Gard  
Or wildwood nights beside the Cornish strand,  
Or Merlin's holier sleep here hard at hand  
Wrapped round with deep soft spells in dim Broce-  
liande.

And with such thirst as joy's drained wine-cup leaves  
When fear to hope as hope to memory cleaves  
His soul desired the dewy sense of leaves,  
The soft green smell of thickets drenched with dawn.  
The faint slot kindling on the fiery lawn  
As day's first hour made keen the spirit again  
That lured and spurred on quest his hound Hodain,  
The breeze, the bloom, the splendour and the sound,  
That stung like fire the hunter and the hound,  
The pulse of wind, the passion of the sea,  
The rapture of the woodland : then would he  
Sigh, and as one that fain would all be dead  
Heavily turn his heavy-laden head  
Back, and close eyes for comfort, finding none.  
And fain he would have died or seen the sun,  
Being sick at heart of darkness : yet afresh  
Began the long strong strife of spirit and flesh  
And branching pangs of thought whose branches bear  
The bloodred fruit whose core is black, despair.  
And the wind slackened and again grew great,  
Palpitant as men's pulses palpitate  
Between the flowing and ebbing tides of fate  
That wash their lifelong waifs of weal and woe  
Through night and light and twilight to and fro.  
Now as a pulse of hope its heartbeat throbbed,  
Now like one stricken shrank and sank and sobbed,

Then, yearning as with child of death, put forth  
A wail that filled the night up south and north  
With woful sound of waters : and he said,  
“ So might the wind wail if the world were dead  
And its wings wandered over nought but sea.  
I would I knew she would not come to me,  
For surely she will come not : then should I,  
Once knowing I shall not look upon her, die.  
I knew not life could so long breathe such breath  
As I do. Nay, what grief were this, if death,  
The sole sure friend of whom the whole world saith  
He lies not, nor hath ever this been said,  
That death would heal not grief—if death were dead  
And all ways closed whence grief might pass with  
life !”

Then softly spake his watching virgin wife  
Out of her heart, deep down below her breath :  
“ Fear not but death shall come—and after death  
Judgment.” And he that heard not answered her,  
Saying—“ Ah, but one there was, if truth not err,  
For true men’s trustful tongues have said it—one  
Whom these mine eyes knew living while the sun  
Looked yet upon him, and mine own ears heard  
The deep sweet sound once of his godlike word—  
Who sleeps and dies not, but with soft live breath  
Takes always all the deep delight of death,  
Through love’s gift of a woman : but for me  
Love’s hand is not the hand of Nimue,  
Love’s word no still smooth murmur of the dove,  
No kiss of peace for me the kiss of love.  
Nor, whatsoe’er thy life’s love ever give,  
Dear, shall it ever bid me sleep or live ;  
Nor from thy brows and lips and living breast  
As his from Nimue’s shall my soul take rest ;

Not rest but unrest hath our long love given—  
Unrest on earth that wins not rest in heaven.  
What rest may we take ever? what have we  
Had ever more of peace than has the sea?  
Has not our life been as a wind that blows  
Through lonelier lands than rear the wild white rose  
That each year sees requickened, but for us  
Time once and twice hath here or there done thus  
And left the next year following empty and bare?  
What rose hath our last year's rose left for heir,  
What wine our last year's vintage? and to me  
More were one fleet forbidden sense of thee,  
One perfume of thy present grace, one thought  
Made truth one hour, ere all mine hours be nought,  
One very word, breath, look, sign, touch of hand,  
Than all the green leaves in Broceliande  
Full of sweet sound, full of sweet wind and sun;  
O God, thou knowest I would no more but one,  
I would no more but once more ere I die  
Find thus much mercy. Nay, but then were I  
Happier than he whom there thy grace hath found,  
For thine it must be, this that wraps him round,  
Thine only, albeit a fiend's force gave him birth,  
Thine that has given him heritage on earth  
Of slumber-sweet eternity to keep  
Fast in soft hold of everliving sleep.  
Happier were I, more sinful man, than he,  
Whom one love-worthier then than Nimue  
Should with a breath make blest among the dead."

And the wan wedded maiden answering said,  
Soft as hate speaks within itself apart:  
"Surely ye shall not, ye that rent mine heart,  
Being one in sin, in punishment be twain."  
And the great knight that heard not spake again

And sighed, but sweet thought of sweet things gone  
by

Kindled with fire of joy the very sigh

And touched it through with rapture : " Ay, this  
were

How much more than the sun and sunbright air,  
How much more than the springtide, how much more  
Than sweet strong sea-wind quickening wave and  
shore

With one divine pulse of continuous breath,  
If she might kiss me with the kiss of death,  
And make the light of life by death's look dim ! "

And the white wedded virgin answered him,  
Inwardly, wan with hurt no herb makes whole :  
" Yea surely, ye whose sin hath slain my soul,  
Surely your own souls shall have peace in death  
And pass with benediction in their breath  
And blessing given of mine their sin hath slain."

And Tristram with sore yearning spake again,  
Saying : " Yea, might this thing once be, how  
should I,

With all my soul made one thanksgiving, die,  
And pass before what judgment-seat may be,  
And cry, ' Lord, now do all thou wilt with me,  
Take all thy fill of justice, work thy will ;  
Though all thy heart of wrath have all its fill,  
My heart of suffering shall endure, and say,  
*For that thou gavest me living yesterday*  
*I bless thee though thou curse me.'* Ay, and well  
Might one cast down into the gulf of hell,  
Remembering this, take heart and thank his fate—  
That God, whose doom now scourges him with hate  
Once, in the wild and whirling world above,  
Bade mercy kiss his dying lips with love.

But if this come not, then he doth me wrong.  
For what hath love done, all this long life long  
That death should trample down his poor last prayer  
Who prays not for forgiveness? Though love were  
Sin dark as hate, have we not here that sinned  
Suffered? has that been less than wintry wind  
Wherewith our love lies blasted? O mine own,  
O mine and no man's yet save mine alone,  
Iseult! what ails thee that I lack so long  
All of thee, all things thine for which I long?  
For more than watersprings to shadeless sands,  
More to me were the comfort of her hands  
Touched once, and more than rays that set and rise  
The glittering arrows of her glorious eyes,  
More to my sense than fire to dead cold air  
The wind and light and odour of her hair,  
More to my soul than summer's to the south  
The mute clear music of her amorous mouth,  
And to my heart's heart more than heaven's great rest  
The fullness of the fragrance of her breast.  
Iseult, Iseult, what grace hath life to give  
More than we twain have had of life, and live?  
Iseult, Iseult, what grace may death not keep  
As sweet for us to win of death, and sleep?  
Come therefore, let us twain pass hence and try  
If it be better not to live but die,  
With love for lamp to light us out of life."

And on that word his wedded maiden wife,  
Pale as the moon in star-forsaken skies  
Ere the sun fill them, rose with set strange eyes  
And gazed on him that saw not: and her heart  
Heaved as a man's death-smitten with a dart  
That smites him sleeping, warm and full of life:  
So toward her lord that was not looked his wife,

His wife that was not : and her heart within  
Burnt bitter like an aftertaste of sin  
To one whose memory drinks and loathes the lee  
Of shame or sorrow deeper than the sea :  
And no fear touched him of her eyes above  
And ears that hoarded each poor word whence love  
Made sweet the broken music of his breath.  
“ Iseult, my life that wast and art my death,  
My life in life that hast been, and that art  
Death in my death, sole wound that cleaves mine  
heart,  
Mine heart that else, how spent soe'er, were whole,  
Breath of my spirit and anguish of my soul,  
How can this be that hence thou canst not hear,  
Being but by space divided ? One is here,  
But one of twain I looked at once to see ;  
Shall death keep time and thou not keep with me ? ”

And the white married maiden laughed at heart,  
Hearing, and scarce with lips at all apart  
Spake, and as fire between them was her breath ;  
“ Yea, now thou liest not : yea, for I am death.”

By this might eyes that watched without behold  
Deep in the gulfs of aching air acold  
The roses of the dawning heaven that strew  
The low soft sun’s way ere his power shine through  
And burn them up with fire : but far to west  
Had sunk the dead moon on the live sea’s breast,  
Slain as with bitter fear to see the sun :  
And eastward was a strong bright wind begun  
Between the clouds and waters : and he said,  
Seeing hardly through dark dawn her doubtful head ;  
“ Iseult ? ” and like a death-bell faint and clear  
The virgin voice rang answer—“ I am here.”

And his heart sprang, and sank again : and she  
Spake, saying, " What would my knightly lord with  
me ? "

And Tristram : " Hath my lady watched all night  
Beside me, and I knew not ? God requite  
Her love for comfort shown a man nigh dead."

" Yea, God shall surely guerdon it," she said,  
" Who hath kept me all my days through to this  
hour."

And Tristram : " God alone hath grace and power  
To pay such grace toward one unworthier shown  
Than ever durst, save only of God alone,  
Crave pardon yet and comfort, as I would  
Crave now for charity if my heart were good,  
But as a coward's it fails me, even for shame."

Then seemed her face a pale funereal flame  
That burns down slow by midnight, as she said :  
" Speak, and albeit thy bidding spake me dead,  
God's love renounce me if it were not done."

And Tristram : " When the sea-line takes the sun  
That now should be not far off sight from far,  
Look if there come not with the morning star  
My ship bound hither from the northward back,  
And if the sail be white thereof or black."

And knowing the soothfast sense of his desire  
So sore the heart within her raged like fire  
She could not wring forth of her lips a word,  
But bowing made sign how humbly had she heard.  
And the sign given made light his heart ; and she  
Set her face hard against the yearning sea  
Now all athirst with trembling trust of hope  
To see the sudden gates of sunrise ope ;  
But thirstier yearned the heart whose fiery gate  
Lay wide that vengeance might come in to hate.

And Tristram lay at thankful rest, and thought  
Now surely life nor death could grieve him aught,  
Since past was now life's anguish as a breath,  
And surely past the bitterness of death.

For seeing he had found at these her hands this grace,  
It could not be but yet some breathing-space  
Might leave him life to look again on love's own face.  
"Since if for death's sake," in his heart he said,  
"Even she take pity upon me quick or dead,  
How shall not even from God's hand be compassion  
shed?"

For night bears dawn, how weak soe'er and wan,  
And sweet ere death, men fable, sings the swan.  
So seems the Swan my signal from the sea  
To sound a song that sweetens death to me  
Clasped round about with radiance from above  
Of dawn, and closer clasped on earth by love.  
Shall all things brighten, and this my sign be dark?"

And high from heaven suddenly rang the lark,  
Triumphant; and the far first refluent ray  
Filled all the hollow darkness full with day.  
And on the deep sky's verge a fluctuant light  
Gleamed, grew, shone, strengthened into perfect  
sight,  
As bowed and dipped and rose again the sail's clear  
white.

And swift and steadfast as a sea-mew's wing  
It neared before the wind, as fain to bring  
Comfort, and shorten yet its narrowing track.  
And she that saw looked hardly toward him back,  
Saying, "Ay, the ship comes surely; but her sail is  
black."

And fain he would have sprung upright, and seen,  
And spoken: but strong death struck sheer between,

And darkness closed as iron round his head :  
And smitten through the heart lay Tristram dead.

And scarce the word had flown abroad, and wail  
Risen, ere to shoreward came the snowbright sail,  
And lightly forth leapt Ganhardine on land,  
And led from ship with swift and reverent hand  
Iseult : and round them up from all the crowd  
Broke the great wail for Tristram out aloud.  
And ere her ear might hear her heart had heard,  
Nor sought she sign for witness of the word ;  
But came and stood above him newly dead,  
And felt his death upon her : and her head  
Bowed, as to reach the spring that slakes all  
drouth ;  
And their four lips became one silent mouth.

So came their hour on them that were in life  
Tristram and Iseult : so from love and strife  
The stroke of love's own hand felt last and best  
Gave them deliverance to perpetual rest.  
So, crownless of the wreaths that life had wound,  
They slept, with flower of tenderer comfort crowned ;  
From bondage and the fear of time set free,  
And all the yoke of space on earth and sea  
Cast as a curb for ever : nor might now  
Fear and desire bid soar their souls or bow,  
Lift up their hearts or break them : doubt nor grief  
More now might move them, dread nor disbelief  
Touch them with shadowy cold or fiery sting,  
Nor sleepless languor with its weary wing,  
Nor harsh estrangement, born of time's vain breath,  
Nor change, a darkness deeper far than death.

And round the sleep that fell around them then  
Earth lies not wrapped, nor records wrought of men  
Rise up for timeless token : but their sleep  
Hath round it like a raiment all the deep ;  
No change or gleam or gloom of sun and rain,  
But all time long the might of all the main  
Spread round them as round earth soft heaven is  
spread,

And peace more strong than death round all the dead.  
For death is of an hour, and after death  
Peace : nor for aught that fear or fancy saith,  
Nor even for very love's own sake, shall strife  
Perplex again that perfect peace with life.

And if, as men that mourn may deem or dream,  
Rest haply here than there might sweeter seem,  
And sleep, that lays one hand on all, more good  
By some sweet grave's grace given of wold or wood  
Or clear high glen or sunbright wind-worn down  
Than where life thunders through the trampling town  
With daylong feet and nightlong overhead,  
What grave may cast such grace round any dead,  
What so sublime sweet sepulchre may be  
For all that life leaves mortal, as the sea ?

And these, rapt forth perforce from earthly ground,  
These twain the deep sea guards, and girdles round  
Their sleep more deep than any sea's gulf lies,  
Though changeless with the change in shifting skies,  
Nor mutable with seasons : for the grave  
That held them once, being weaker than a wave,  
The waves long since have buried : though their tomb  
Was royal that by ruth's relenting doom  
Men gave them in Tintagel : for the word  
Took wing which thrilled all piteous hearts that  
heard

The word wherethrough their lifelong lot stood  
shown,  
And when the long sealed springs of fate were  
known,  
The blind bright innocence of lips that quaffed  
Love, and the marvel of the mastering draught,  
And all the fraughtage of the fateful bark,  
Loud like a child upon them wept King Mark,  
Seeing round the sword's hilt which long since had  
fought

For Cornwall's love a scroll of writing wrought,  
A scripture writ of Tristram's hand, wherein  
Lay bare the sinless source of all their sin,  
No choice of will, but chance and sorcerous art,  
With prayer of him for pardon : and his heart  
Was molten in him, wailing as he kissed  
Each with the kiss of kinship—" Had I wist,  
Ye had never sinned nor died thus, nor had I  
Borne in this doom that bade you sin and die  
So sore a part of sorrow." And the king  
Built for their tomb a chapel bright like spring  
With flower-soft wealth of branching tracery made  
Fair as the frondage each fleet year sees fade,  
That should not fall till many a year were done.  
There slept they wedded under moon and sun  
And change of stars : and through the casements  
came  
Midnight and noon girt round with shadow and  
flame  
To illume their grave or veil it : till at last  
On these things too was doom as darkness cast :  
For the strong sea hath swallowed wall and tower,  
And where their limbs were laid in woful hour

For many a fathom gleams and moves and moans  
The tide that sweeps above their coffined bones  
In the wrecked chancel by the shivered shrine :  
Nor where they sleep shall moon or sunlight shine  
Nor man look down for ever : none shall say,  
Here once, or here, Tristram and Iseult lay :  
But peace they have that none may gain who live,  
And rest about them that no love can give,  
And over them, while death and life shall be,  
The light and sound and darkness of the sea.



# THE TALE OF BALEN



## DEDICATION

TO MY MOTHER

LOVE that holds life and death in fee,

Deep as the clear unsounded sea

And sweet as life or death can be,

Lays here my hope, my heart, and me

Before you, silent, in a song.

Since the old wild tale, made new, found grace,

When half sung through, before your face,

It needs must live a springtide space,

While April suns grow strong.

*March 24, 1896.*



I

IN hawthorn-time the heart grows light,  
The world is sweet in sound and sight,  
Glad thoughts and birds take flower and flight,  
The heather kindles toward the light,

The whin is frankincense and flame.

And be it for strife or be it for love  
The falcon quickens as the dove  
When earth is touched from heaven above  
With joy that knows no name.

And glad in spirit and sad in soul  
With dream and doubt of days that roll  
As waves that race and find no goal  
Rode on by bush and brake and bole

A northern child of earth and sea.

The pride of life before him lay  
Radiant : the heavens of night and day  
Shone less than shone before his way  
His ways and days to be.

And all his life of blood and breath  
Sang out within him : time and death  
Were even as words a dreamer saith  
When sleep within him slackeneth,

And light and life and spring were one.

The steed between his knees that sprang,  
The moors and woods that shone and sang,  
The hours wherethrough the spring's breath rang,  
Seemed ageless as the sun.

But alway through the bounteous bloom  
That earth gives thanks if heaven illumé  
His soul forefelt a shadow of doom,  
His heart foreknew a gloomier gloom

Than closes all men's equal ways.

Albeit the spirit of life's light spring  
With pride of heart upheld him, king  
And lord of hours like snakes that sting  
And nights that darken days.

And as the strong spring round him grew  
Stronger, and all blithe winds that blew  
Blither, and flowers that flowered anew  
More glad of sun and air and dew,

The shadow lightened on his soul  
And brightened into death and died  
Like winter, as the bloom waxed wide  
From woodside on to riverside

And southward goal to goal.

Along the wandering ways of Tyne,  
By beech and birch and thorn that shine  
And laugh when life's requickening wine  
Makes night and noon and dawn divine

And stirs in all the veins of spring,  
And past the brightening banks of Tees,  
He rode as one that breathes and sees  
A sun more blithe, a merrier breeze,

A life that hails him king.

And down the softening south that knows  
No more how glad the heather glows,  
Nor how, when winter's clarion blows  
Across the bright Northumbrian snows,  
    Sea-mists from east and westward meet,  
Past Avon senseless yet of song  
And Thames that bore but swans in throng  
He rode elate in heart and strong  
    In trust of days as sweet.

So came he through to Camelot,  
Glad, though for shame his heart waxed hot,  
For hope within it withered not  
To see the shaft it dreamed of shot  
    Fair toward the glimmering goal of fame.  
And all King Arthur's knightliest there  
Approved him knightly, swift to dare  
And keen to bid their records bear  
    Sir Balen's northern name.

Sir Balen of Northumberland  
Gat grace before the king to stand  
High as his heart was, and his hand  
Wrought honour toward the strange north strand  
    That sent him south so goodly a knight.  
And envy, sick with sense of sin,  
Began as poisonous herbs begin  
To work in base men's blood, akin  
    To men's of nobler might.

And even so fell it that his doom,  
For all his bright life's kindling bloom  
And light that took no thought for gloom,  
Fell as a breath from the opening tomb  
    Full on him ere he wist or thought.

For once a churl of royal seed,  
 King Arthur's kinsman, faint in deed  
 And loud in word that knew not heed,  
 Spake shame where shame was nought.

"What doth one here in Camelot  
 Whose birth was northward? Wot we not  
 As all his brethren borderers wot  
 How blind of heart, how keen and hot,  
 The wild north lives and hates the south?  
 Men of the narrowing march that knows  
 Nought save the strength of storms and snows,  
 What would these carles where knighthood blows  
 A trump of kinglike mouth?"

Swift from his place leapt Balen, smote  
 The liar across his face, and wrote  
 His wrath in blood upon the bloat  
 Brute cheek that challenged shame for note  
 How vile a king-born knave might be.  
 Forth sprang their swords, and Balen slew  
 The knave ere well one witness knew  
 Of all that round them stood or drew  
 What sight was there to see.

Then spake the great king's wrathful will  
 A doom for six dark months to fill  
 Wherein close prison held him, still  
 And steadfast-souled for good or ill.

But when those weary days lay dead  
 His lordliest knights and barons spake  
 Before the king for Balen's sake  
 Good speech and wise, of force to break  
 The bonds that bowed his head.

## II

IN linden-time the heart is high  
 For pride of summer passing by  
 With lordly laughter in her eye ;  
 A heavy splendour in the sky

Uplifts and bows it down again.  
 The spring had waned from wood and wold  
 Since Balen left his prison hold  
 And lowlier-hearted than of old  
 Beheld it wax and wane.

Though humble heart and poor array  
 Kept not from spirit and sense away  
 Their noble nature, nor could slay  
 The pride they bade but pause and stay  
 Till time should bring its trust to flower,  
 Yet even for noble shame's sake, born  
 Of hope that smiled on hate and scorn,  
 He held him still as earth ere morn  
 Ring forth her rapturous hour.

But even as earth when dawn takes flight  
 And beats her wings of dewy light  
 Full in the faltering face of night,  
 His soul awoke to claim by right  
 The life and death of deed and doom,

When once before the king there came  
 A maiden clad with grief and shame  
 And anguish burning her like flame  
 That feeds on flowers in bloom.

Beneath a royal mantle, fair  
 With goodly work of lustrous vair,  
 Girt fast against her side she bare  
 A sword whose weight bade all men there  
 Quail to behold her face again.  
 Save of a passing perfect knight  
 Not great alone in force and fight  
 It might not be for any might  
 Drawn forth, and end her pain.

So said she : then King Arthur spake :  
 " Albeit indeed I dare not take  
 Such praise on me, for knighthood's sake  
 And love of ladies will I make  
 Assay if better none may be."  
 By girdle and by sheath he caught  
 The sheathed and girded sword, and wrought  
 With strength whose force availed him nought  
 To save and set her free.

Again she spake : " No need to set  
 The might that man has matched not yet  
 Against it ; he whose hand shall get  
 Grace to release the bonds that fret  
 My bosom and my girdlestead  
 With little strain of strength or strife  
 Shall bring me as from death to life  
 And win to sister or to wife  
 Fame that outlives men dead."

Then bade the king his knights assay  
This mystery that before him lay  
And mocked his might of manhood. " Nay,"  
Quoth she, " the man that takes away

This burden laid on me must be  
A knight of record clean and fair  
As sunlight and the flowerful air,  
By sire and mother born to bear  
A name to shame not me."

Then forth strode Launcelot, and laid  
The mighty-moulded hand that made  
Strong knights reel back like birds affrayed  
By storm that smote them as they strayed  
Against the hilt that yielded not.

Then Tristram, bright and sad and kind  
As one that bore in noble mind  
Love that made light as darkness blind,  
Fared even as Launcelot.

Then Lamoracke, with hardier cheer,  
As one that held all hope and fear  
Wherethrough the spirit of man may steer  
In life and death less dark or dear,

Laid hand thereon, and fared as they.  
With half a smile his hand he drew  
Back from the spell-bound thing, and threw  
With half a glance his heart anew  
Toward no such blameless may.

Between Iseult and Guenevere  
Sat one of name as high to hear,  
But darklier doomed than they whose cheer  
Foreshowed not yet the deadlier year  
That bids the queenliest head bow down,

The queen Morgause of Orkney : they  
 With scarce a flash of the eye could say  
 The very word of dawn, when day  
 Gives earth and heaven their crown.

But bright and dark as night or noon  
 And lowering as a storm-flushed moon  
 When clouds and thwarting winds distune  
 The music of the midnight, soon

To die from darkening star to star  
 And leave a silence in the skies  
 That yearns till dawn find voice and rise,  
 Shone strange as fate Morgause, with eyes  
 That dwelt on days afar.

A glance that shot on Lamoracke  
 As from a storm-cloud bright and black  
 Fire swift and blind as death's own track  
 Turned fleet as flame on Arthur back

From him whose hand forsook the hilt :  
 And one in blood and one in sin  
 Their hearts caught fire of pain within  
 And knew no goal for them to win  
 But death that guerdons guilt.

Then Gawain, sweet of soul and gay  
 As April ere he dreams of May,  
 Strove, and prevailed not ; then Sir Kay,  
 The snake-souled envier, vile as they

That fawn and foam and lurk and lie,  
 Sire of the bastard band whose brood  
 Was alway found at servile feud  
 With honour, faint and false and lewd,  
 Scarce grasped and put it by.

Then wept for woe the damsel bound  
With iron and with anguish round,  
That none to help her grief was found  
Or loose the inextricably inwound

Grim curse that girt her life with grief  
And made a burden of her breath,  
Harsh as the bitterness of death.  
Then spake the king as one that saith  
Words bitterer even than brief.

“ Methought the wide round world could bring  
Before the face of queen or king  
No knights more fit for fame to sing  
Than fill this full Round Table’s ring

With honour higher than pride of place :  
But now my heart is wrung to know,  
Damsel, that none whom fame can show  
Finds grace to heal or help thy woe :  
God gives them not the grace.”

Then from the lowliest place thereby,  
With heart-ekindled cheek and eye  
Most like the star and kindling sky  
That say the sundawn’s hour is high

When rapture trembles through the sea,  
Strode Balen in his poor array  
Forth, and took heart of grace to pray  
The damsel suffer even him to assay  
His power to set her free.

Nay, how should he avail, she said,  
Averse with scorn-averted head,  
Where these availe not ? none had sped  
Of all these mightier men that led  
The lists wherein he might not ride,

And how should less men speed ? But he,  
 With lordlier pride of courtesy,  
 Put forth his hand and set her free  
 From pain and humbled pride.

But on the sword he gazed elate  
 With hope set higher than fear or fate,  
 Or doubt of darkling days in wait ;  
 And when her thankful praise waxed great  
     And craved of him the sword again,  
 He would not give it. “ Nay, for mine  
 It is till force may make it thine.”  
 A smile that shone as death may shine  
     Spake toward him bale and bane.

Strange lightning flickered from her eyes.  
 “ Gentle and good in knightliest guise  
 And meet for quest of strange emprise  
 Thou hast here approved thee : yet not wise  
     To keep the sword from me, I wis.  
 For with it thou shalt surely slay  
 Of all that look upon the day  
 The man best loved of thee, and lay  
     Thine own life down for his.”

“ What chance God sends, that chance I take,”  
 He said. Then soft and still she spake ;  
 “ I would but for thine only sake  
 Have back the sword of thee, and break  
     The links of doom that bind thee round.  
 But seeing thou wilt not have it so,  
 My heart for thine is wrung with woe.”  
 “ God’s will,” quoth he, “ it is, we know,  
     Wherewith our lives are bound.”

"Repent it must thou soon," she said,  
"Who wouldst not hear the rede I read  
For thine and not for my sake, sped  
In vain as waters heavenward shed

From springs that falter and depart  
Earthward. God bids not thee believe  
Truth, and the web thy life must weave  
For even this sword to close and cleave  
Hangs heavy round my heart."

So passed she mourning forth. But he,  
With heart of springing hope set free  
As birds that breast and brave the sea,  
Bade horse and arms and armour be

Made straightway ready toward the fray.  
Nor even might Arthur's royal prayer  
Withhold him, but with frank and fair  
Thanksgiving and leave-taking there  
He turned him thence away.

## III

As the east wind, when the morning's breast  
 Gleams like a bird's that leaves the nest,  
 A fledgeling halcyon's bound on quest,  
 Drives wave on wave on wave to west

Till all the sea be life and light,  
 So time's mute breath, that brings to bloom  
 All flowers that strew the dead spring's tomb,  
 Drives day on day on day to doom

Till all man's day be night.

Brief as the breaking of a wave  
 That hurls on man his thunderous grave  
 Ere fear find breath to cry or crave  
 Life that no chance may spare or save,

The light of joy and glory shone  
 Even as in dreams where death seems dead  
 Round Balen's hope-exalted head,  
 Shone, passed, and lightened as it fled  
 The shadow of doom thereon.

For as he bound him thence to fare,  
 Before the stately presence there  
 A lady like a windflower fair,  
 Girt on with raiment strange and rare  
 That rippled whispering round her, came.

Her clear cold eyes, all glassy grey,  
Seemed lit not with the light of day  
But touched with gleams that waned away  
    Of quelled and fading flame.

Before the king she bowed and spake :  
“ King, for thine old faith’s plighted sake  
To me the lady of the lake,  
I come in trust of thee to take

    The guerdon of the gift I gave,  
Thy sword Excalibur.” And he  
Made answer : “ Be it whate’er it be,  
If mine to give, I give it thee,  
    Nor need is thine to crave.”

As when a gleam of wicked light  
Turns half a low-lying water bright  
That moans beneath the shivering night  
With sense of evil sound and sight

    And whispering witchcraft’s bated breath.  
Her wan face quickened as she said :  
“ This knight that won the sword—his head  
I crave or hers that brought it. Dead,  
    Let these be one in death.”

“ Not with mine honour this may be ;  
Ask all save this thou wilt,” quoth he,  
“ And have thy full desire.” But she  
Made answer : “ Nought will I of thee,  
    Nought if not this.” Then Balen turned,  
And saw the sorceress hard beside  
By whose fell craft his mother died :  
Three years he had sought her, and here espied  
    His heart against her yearned.

" Ill be thou met," he said, " whose ire  
 Would slake with blood thy soul's desire :  
 By thee my mother died in fire ;  
 Die thou by me a death less dire."

Sharp flashed his sword forth, fleet as flame,  
 And shore away her sorcerous head.

" Alas for shame," the high king said,  
 " That one found once my friend lies dead ;  
 Alas for all our shame !

" Thou shouldst have here forborne her ; yea,  
 Were all the wrongs that bid men slay  
 Thine, heaped too high for wrath to weigh,  
 Not here before my face to-day

Was thine the right to wreak thy wrong."  
 Still stood he then as one that found  
 His rose of hope by storm discrowned,  
 And all the joy that girt him round  
 Brief as a broken song.

Yet ere he passed he turned and spake :  
 " King, only for thy nobler sake  
 Than aught of power man's power may take  
 Or pride of place that pride may break

I bid the lordlier man in thee,  
 That lives within the king, give ear.  
 This justice done before thee here  
 On one that hell's own heart holds dear,  
 Needs might not this but be.

" Albeit, for all that pride would prove,  
 My heart be wrung to lose thy love,  
 It yet repents me not hereof :  
 So many an eagle and many a dove,  
 So many a knight, so many a may,

This water-snake of poisonous tongue  
To death by words and wiles hath stung,  
That her their slayer, from hell's lake sprung,  
I did not ill to slay."

"Yea," said the king, "too high of heart  
To stand before a king thou art ;  
Yet irks it me to bid thee part  
And take thy penance for thy part,

That God may put upon thy pride."

Then Balen took the severed head  
And toward his hostry turned and sped  
As one that knew not quick from dead  
Nor good from evil tide.

He bade his squire before him stand  
And take that sanguine spoil in hand  
And bear it far by shore and strand  
Till all in glad Northumberland

That loved him, seeing it, all might know  
His deadliest foe was dead, and hear  
How free from prison as from fear  
He dwelt in trust of the answering year  
To bring him weal for woe.

"And tell them, now I take my way  
To meet in battle, if I may,  
King Ryons of North Wales, and slay  
That king of kerns whose fiery sway

Doth all the marches dire despite  
That serve King Arthur : so shall he  
Again be gracious lord to me,  
And I that leave thee meet with thee  
Once more in Arthur's sight."

So spake he ere they parted, nor  
 Took shame or fear to counsellor,  
 As one whom none laid ambush for ;  
 And wist not how Sir Launceor,

The wild king's son of Ireland, hot  
 And high in wrath to know that one  
 Stood higher in fame before the sun,  
 Even Balen, since the sword was won,  
 Drew nigh from Camelot.

For thence, in heat of hate and pride,  
 As one that man might bid not bide,  
 He craved the high king's grace to ride  
 On quest of Balen far and wide

And wreak the wrong his wrath had wrought.  
 "Yea," Arthur said, "for such despite  
 Was done me never in my sight  
 As this thine hand shall now requite  
 If trust avail us aught."

But ere he passed, in eager mood  
 To feed his hate with bitter food,  
 Before the king's face Merlin stood  
 And heard his tale of ill and good,

Of Balen, and the sword achieved,  
 And whence it smote as heaven's red ire  
 That direful dame of doom as dire ;  
 And how the king's wrath turned to fire  
 The grief wherewith he grieved.

And darkening as he gave it ear,  
 The still face of the sacred seer  
 Waxed wan with wrath and not with fear,  
 And ever changed its cloudier cheer  
 Till all his face was very night.

“ This damosel that brought the sword,”  
He said, “ before the king my lord,  
And all these knights about his board,  
Hath done them all despite.

“ The falsest damosel she is  
That works men ill on earth, I wis,  
And all her mind is toward but this,  
To kill as with a lying kiss  
Truth, and the life of noble trust.  
A brother hath she,—see but now  
The flame of shame that brands her brow !—  
A true man, pure as faith’s own vow,  
Whose honour knows not rust.

“ This good knight found within her bower  
A felon and her paramour,  
And slew him in his shameful hour,  
As right gave might and righteous power  
To hands that wreaked so foul a wrong.  
Then, for the hate her heart put on,  
She sought by ways where death had gone  
The lady Lyle of Avalon,  
Whose crafts are strange and strong.

“ The sorceress, one with her in thought,  
Gave her that sword of magic, wrought  
By charms whereof sweet heaven sees nought,  
That hither girt on her she brought  
To be by doom her brother’s bane.  
And grief it is to think how he  
That won it, being of heart so free  
And perfect found in chivalry,  
Shall by that sword lie slain.

“Great pity it is and strange despite  
That one whose eyes are stars to light  
Honour, and shine as heaven’s own height,  
Should perish, being the goodliest knight  
That even the all-glorious north has borne.  
Nor shall my lord the king behold  
A lordlier friend of mightier mould  
Than Balen, though his tale be told  
Ere noon fulfil his morn.”

## IV

As morning hears before it run  
 The music of the mounting sun,  
 And laughs to watch his trophies won  
 From darkness, and her hosts undone,

And all the night become a breath,  
 Nor dreams that fear should hear and flee  
 The summer menace of the sea,  
 So hears our hope what life may be,  
 And knows it not for death.

Each day that slays its hours and dies  
 Weeps, laughs, and lightens on our eyes,  
 And sees and hears not : smiles and sighs  
 As flowers ephemeral fall and rise  
 About its birth, about its way,  
 And pass as love and sorrow pass,  
 As shadows flashing down a glass,  
 As dew-flowers blowing in flowerless grass,  
 As hope from yesterday.

The blossom of the sunny dew  
 That now the stronger sun strikes through  
 Fades off the blade whereon it blew  
 No fleetlier than the flowers that grew  
 On hope's green stem in life's fierce light.

Nor might the glory soon to sit  
 Awhile on Balen's crest alit  
 Outshine the shadow of doom on it  
 Or stay death's wings from flight.

Dawn on a golden moorland side  
 By holt and heath saw Balen ride  
 And Launceor after, pricked with pride  
 And stung with spurring envy : wide

And far he had ridden athwart strange lands  
 And sought amiss the man he found  
 And cried on, till the stormy sound  
 Rang as a rallying trumpet round

That fires men's hearts and hands.

Abide he bade him : nor was need  
 To bid when Balen wheeled his steed  
 Fiercely, less fain by word than deed  
 To bid his envier evil speed,

And cried, "What wilt thou with me?" Loud  
 Rang Launceor's vehement answer : "Knight,  
 To avenge on thee the dire despite  
 Thou hast done us all in Arthur's sight

I stand toward Arthur vowed."

"Ay?" Balen said : "albeit I see  
 I needs must deal in strife with thee,  
 Light is the wyte thou layest on me ;  
 For her I slew and sinned not, she  
 Was dire in all men's eyes as death,  
 Or none were lother found than I  
 By me to bid a woman die :  
 As lief were loyal men to lie,  
 Or scorn what honour saith."

As the arched wave's weight against the reef  
 Hurls, and is hurled back like a leaf  
 Storm-shrivelled, and its rage of grief  
 Speaks all the loud broad sea in brief,

And quells the hearkening hearts of men,  
 Or as the crash of overfalls  
 Down under blue smooth water brawls  
 Like jarring steel on ruining walls,  
 So rang their meeting then.

As wave on wave shocks, and confounds  
 The bounding bulk whereon it bounds  
 And breaks and shattering seaward sounds  
 As crying of the old sea's wolves and hounds  
 That moan and ravin and rage and wail,  
 So steed on steed encountering sheer  
 Shocked, and the strength of Launceor's spear  
 Shivered on Balen's shield, and fear  
 Bade hope within him quail.

But Balen's spear through Launceor's shield  
 Clove as a ploughshare cleaves the field  
 And pierced the hauberk triple-stealed,  
 That horse with horseman stricken reeled,  
 And as a storm-breached rock falls, fell,  
 And Balen turned his horse again  
 And wist not yet his foe lay slain,  
 And saw him dead that sought his bane  
 And wrought and fared not well.

Suddenly, while he gazed and stood,  
 And mused in many-minded mood  
 If life or death were evil or good,  
 Forth of a covert of a wood  
 That skirted half the moorland lea

Fast rode a maiden flower-like white  
 Full toward that fair wild place of fight,  
 Anhungered of the woful sight  
 God gave her there to see.

And seeing the man there fallen and dead,  
 She cried against the sun that shed  
 Light on the living world, and said,  
 "O Balen, slayer whose hand is red,

Two bodies and one heart thou hast slain,  
 Two hearts within one body : aye,  
 Two souls thou hast lost ; by thee they die,  
 Cast out of sight of earth and sky  
 And all that made them fain."

And from the dead his sword she caught,  
 And fell in trance that wist of nought,  
 Swooning : but softly Balen sought  
 To win from her the sword she thought

To die on, dying by Launceor's side.  
 Again her wakening wail outbroke,  
 As wildly, sword in hand, she woke  
 And struck one swift and bitter stroke  
 That healed her, and she died.

And sorrowing for their strange love's sake  
 Rode Balen forth by lawn and lake,  
 By moor and moss and briar and brake,  
 And in his heart their sorrow spake

Whose lips were dumb as death, and said  
 Mute words of presage blind and vain  
 As rain-stars blurred and marred by rain  
 To wanderers on a moonless main  
 Where night and day seem dead.

Then toward a sunbright wildwood side  
He looked and saw beneath it ride  
A knight whose arms afar espied  
By note of name and proof of pride  
    Bare witness of his brother born,  
His brother Balan, hard at hand,  
Twin flower of bright Northumberland,  
Twin sea-bird of their loud sea-strand,  
    Twin song-bird of their morn.

Ah then from Balen passed away  
All dread of night, all doubt of day,  
All care what life or death might say,  
All thought of all worse months than May :

    Only the might of joy in love  
Brake forth within him as a fire,  
And deep delight in deep desire  
Of far-flown days whose full-souled quire  
    Rang round from the air above.

From choral earth and quiring air  
Rang memories winged like songs that bear  
Sweet gifts for spirit and sense to share :  
For no man's life knows love more fair  
    And fruitful of memorial things  
Than this the deep dear love that breaks  
With sense of life on life, and makes  
The sundawn sunnier as it wakes  
    Where morning round it rings.

“ O brother, O my brother ! ” cried  
Each upon each, and cast aside  
Their helms unbraced that might not hide  
From sight of memory single-eyed  
    The likeness graven of face and face,

And kissed and wept upon each other  
 For joy and pity of either brother,  
 And love engraffed by sire and mother,  
 God's natural gift of grace.

And each with each took counsel meet  
 For comfort, making sorrow sweet,  
 And grief a goodly thing to greet :  
 And word from word leapt light and fleet  
     Till all the venturous tale was told,  
 And how in Balen's hope it lay  
 To meet the wild Welsh king and slay,  
 And win from Arthur back for pay  
     The grace he gave of old.

“ And thither wilt not thou with me  
 And win as great a grace for thee ? ”  
 “ That will I well,” quoth Balan : “ we  
 Will cleave together, bound and free,  
     As brethren should, being twain and one.”  
 But ere they parted thence there came  
 A creature withered as with flame,  
 A dwarf mismade in nature's shame,  
     Between them and the sun.

And riding fleet as fire may glide  
 He found the dead lie side by side,  
 And wailed and rent his hair and cried,  
 “ Who hath done this deed ? ” And Balen eyed  
     The strange thing loathfully, and said,  
 “ The knight I slew, who found him fain  
 And keen to slay me : seeing him slain,  
 The maid I sought to save in vain,  
     Self-stricken, here lies dead.

“ Sore grief was mine to see her die,  
And for her true faith’s sake shall I  
Love, and with love of heart more high,  
All women better till I die.”

“ Alas,” the dwarf said, “ ill for thee  
In evil hour this deed was done :  
For now the quest shall be begun  
Against thee, from the dawning sun  
Even to the sunset sea.

“ From shore to mountain, dawn to night,  
The kinsfolk of this great dead knight  
Will chase thee to thy death.” A light  
Of swift blithe scorn flashed answer bright

As fire from Balen’s eye. “ For that,  
Small fear shall fret my heart,” quoth he :  
“ But that my lord the king should be  
For this dead man’s sake wroth with me,  
Weep might it well thereat.”

Then murmuring passed the dwarf away,  
And toward the knights in fair array  
Came riding eastward up the way  
From where the flower-soft lowlands lay

A king whose name the sweet south-west  
Held high in honour, and the land  
That bowed beneath his gentle hand  
Wore on its wild bright northern strand  
Tintagel for a crest.

And Balen hailed with homage due  
King Mark of Cornwall, when he knew  
The pennon that before him flew :  
And for those lovers dead and true  
The king made moan to hear their doorn ;

And for their sorrow's sake he sware  
To seek in all the marches there  
The church that man might find most fair  
And build therein their tomb.

## v

As thought from thought takes wing and flies,  
 As month on month with sunlit eyes  
 Tramples and triumphs in its rise,  
 As wave smites wave to death and dies,

So chance on hurtling chance like steel  
 Strikes, flashes, and is quenched, ere fear  
 Can whisper hope, or hope can hear,  
 If sorrow or joy be far or near

For time to hurt or heal.

Swift as a shadow and strange as light  
 That cleaves in twain the shadow of night  
 Before the wide-winged word takes flight  
 That thunder speaks to depth and height

And quells the quiet hour with sound,  
 There came before King Mark and stood  
 Between the moorside and the wood  
 The man whose word God's will made good,  
 Nor guile was in it found.

And Merlin said to Balen : " Lo,  
 Thou hast wrought thyself a grievous woe  
 To let this lady die, and know  
 Thou mightst have stayed her deadly blow."

And Balen answered him and said,

“ Nay, by my truth to faith, not I,  
 So fiercely fain she was to die ;  
 Ere well her sword had flashed on high,  
 Self-slain she lay there dead.”

Again and sadly Merlin spake :  
 “ My heart is wrung for this deed’s sake,  
 To know thee therefore doomed to take  
 Upon thine hand a curse, and make

Three kingdoms pine through twelve years’  
 change,

In want and woe : for thou shalt smite  
 The man most noble and truest knight  
 That looks upon the live world’s light  
 A dolorous stroke and strange.

“ And not till years shall round their goal  
 May this man’s wound thou hast given be whole.”  
 And Balen, stricken through the soul  
 By dark-winged words of doom and dole,

Made answer : “ If I wist it were  
 No lie but sooth thou sayest of me,  
 Then even to make a liar of thee  
 Would I too slay myself, and see  
 How death bids dead men fare.”

And Merlin took his leave and passed  
 And was not : and the shadow as fast  
 Went with him that his word had cast,  
 Too fleet for thought thereof to last :

And there those brethren bade King Mark  
 Farewell : but fain would Mark have known  
 The strong knight’s name who had overthrown  
 The pride of Launceor, when it shone  
 Bright as it now lay dark.

And Balan for his brother spake,  
 Saying : " Sir, albeit him list not break  
 The seal of secret time, nor shake  
 Night off him ere his morning wake,

By these two swords he is girt withal  
 May men that praise him, knights and lords,  
 Call him the knight that bears two swords,  
 And all the praise his fame accords  
 Make answer when they call."

So parted they toward eventide ;  
 And tender twilight, heavy-eyed,  
 Saw deep down glimmering woodlands ride  
 Balen and Balan side by side,

Till where the leaves grew dense and dim  
 Again they spied from far draw near  
 The presence of the sacred seer,  
 But so disguised and strange of cheer  
 That seeing they knew not him.

" Now whither ride ye," Merlin said,  
 " Through shadows that the sun strikes red,  
 Ere night be born or day be dead ? "  
 But they, for doubt half touched with dread,

Would say not where their goal might lie.  
 " And thou," said Balen, " what art thou,  
 To walk with shrouded eye and brow ? "  
 He said : " Me lists not show thee now

By name what man am I."

" Ill seen is this of thee," said they,  
 " That thou art true in word and way  
 Nor fain to fear the face of day,  
 Who wilt not as a true man say

The name it shames not him to bear."

He answered : “ Be it or be it not so,  
 Yet why ye ride this way I know,  
 To meet King Ryons as a foe,  
 And how your hope shall fare.

“ Well, if ye hearken toward my rede,  
 Ill, if ye hear not, shall ye speed.”

“ Ah, now,” they cried, “ thou art ours at need :  
 What Merlin saith we are fain to heed.”

“ Great worship shall ye win,” said he,  
 “ And look that ye do knightly now,  
 For great shall be your need, I trow.”  
 And Balen smiled : “ By knighthood’s vow,  
 The best we may will we.”

Then Merlin bade them turn and take  
 Rest, for their good steeds’ weary sake,  
 Between the highway and the brake,  
 Till starry midnight bade them wake :

Then “ Rise,” he said, “ the king is nigh,  
 Who hath stolen from all his host away  
 With threescore horse in armed array,  
 The goodliest knights that bear his sway  
 And hold his kingdom high.

“ And twenty ride of them before  
 To bear his errand, ere the door  
 Turn of the night, sealed fast no more,  
 And sundawn bid the stars wax hoar ;

For by the starshine of to-night  
 He seeks a leman where she waits  
 His coming, dark and swift as fate’s,  
 And hearkens toward the unopening gates  
 That yield not him to sight.”

Then through the glimmering gloom around  
A shadowy sense of light and sound  
Made, ere the proof thereof were found,  
The brave blithe hearts within them bound,

And "Where," quoth Balen, "rides the king?"  
But softer spake the seer: "Abide,  
Till hither toward your spears he ride,  
Where all the narrowing woodland side  
Grows dense with boughs that cling."

There in that straitening way they met  
The wild Welsh host against them set,  
And smote their strong king down, ere yet  
His hurrying horde of spears might get

Fierce vantage of them. Then the fight  
Grew great and joyous as it grew,  
For left and right those brethren slew,  
Till all the lawn waxed red with dew  
More deep than dews of night.

And ere the full fierce ale was read  
Full forty lay before them dead,  
And fast the hurtling remnant fled  
And wist not whither fear had led:

And toward the king they went again,  
And would have slain him: but he bowed  
Before them, crying in fear aloud  
For grace they gave him, seeing the proud  
Wild king brought lowest of men.

And ere the wildwood leaves were stirred  
With song or wing of wakening bird,  
In Camelot was Merlin's word  
With joy in joyous wonder heard  
That told of Arthur's bitterest foe

Diskingdomed and discomfited.  
 “ By whom ? ” the high king smiled and said.  
 He answered : “ Ere the dawn wax red,  
 To-morrow bids you know.

“ Two knights whose heart and hope are one  
 And fain to win your grace have done  
 This work whereby if grace be won  
 Their hearts shall hail the enkindling sun  
 With joy more keen and deep than day.”  
 And ere the sundawn drank the dew  
 Those brethren with their prisoner drew  
 To the outer guard they gave him to  
 And passed again away.

And Arthur came as toward his guest  
 To greet his foe, and bade him rest  
 As one returned from nobler quest  
 And welcome from the stormbright west,  
 But by what chance he fain would hear.  
 “ The chance was hard and strange, sir king,”  
 Quoth Ryons, bowed in thanksgiving.  
 “ Who won you ? ” Arthur said : “ the thing  
 Is worth a warrior’s ear.”

The wild king flushed with pride and shame,  
 Answering : “ I know not either name  
 Of those that there against us came  
 And withered all our strength like flame :  
 The knight that bears two swords is one,  
 And one his brother : not on earth  
 May men meet men of knightlier worth  
 Nor mightier born of mortal birth  
 That hail the sovereign sun.”

And Arthur said : “ I know them not ;  
 But much am I for this, God wot,  
 Beholden to them : Launcelot

Nor Tristram, when the war waxed hot

Along the marches east and west,  
 Wrought ever nobler work than this.”

“ Ah,” Merlin said, “ sore pity it is  
 And strange mischance of doom, I wis,  
 That death should mar their quest.

“ Balen, the perfect knight that won  
 The sword whose name is malison,  
 And made his deed his doom, is one :  
 Nor hath his brother Balan done

Less royal service : not on earth  
 Lives there a nobler knight, more strong  
 Of soul to win men’s praise in song,  
 Albeit the light abide not long

That lightened round his birth.

“ Yea, and of all sad things I know  
 The heaviest and the highest in woe  
 Is this, the doom whose date brings low  
 Too soon in timeless overthrow

A head so high, a hope so sure.  
 The greatest moan for any knight  
 That ever won fair fame in fight  
 Shall be for Balen, seeing his might  
 Must now not long endure.”

“ Alas,” King Arthur said, “ he hath shown  
 Such love to me-ward that the moan  
 Made of him should be mine alone  
 Above all other, knowing it known  
 I have ill deserved it of him.” “ Nay,”

Said Merlin, " he shall do for you  
 Much more, when time shall be anew,  
 Than time hath given him chance to do  
 Or hope may think to say.

" But now must be your powers purveyed  
 To meet, ere noon of morn be made  
 To-morrow, all the host arrayed  
 Of this wild foe's wild brother, laid  
 Around against you : see to it well,  
 For now I part from you." And soon,  
 When sundawn slew the withering moon,  
 Two hosts were met to win the boon  
 Whose tale is death's to tell.

A lordly tale of knights and lords  
 For death to tell by count of swords  
 When war's wild harp in all its chords  
 Rang royal triumph, and the hordes  
 Of hurtling foemen rocked and reeled  
 As waves wind-thwarted on the sea,  
 Was told of all that there might be,  
 Till scarce might battle hear or see  
 The fortune of the field.

And many a knight won fame that day  
 When even the serpent soul of Kay  
 Was kindled toward the fiery play  
 As might a lion's be for prey,  
 And won him fame that might not die  
 With passing of his rancorous breath  
 But clung about his life and death  
 As fire that speaks in cloud, and saith  
 What strong men hear and fly.

And glorious works were Arthur's there,  
That lit the battle-darkened air :  
But when they saw before them fare  
Like stars of storm the knight that bare  
Two swords about him girt for fray,  
Balen, and Balan with him, then  
Strong wonder smote the souls of men  
If heaven's own host or hell's deep den  
Had sent them forth to slay.

So keen they rode across the fight,  
So sharp they smote to left and right,  
And made of hurtling darkness light  
With lightning of their swords, till flight  
And fear before them flew like flame,  
That Arthur's self had never known,  
He said, since first his blast was blown,  
Such lords of war as these alone  
That whence he knew not came.

But while the fire of war waxed hot  
The wild king hearkened, hearing not,  
Through storm of spears and arrow-shot,  
For succour toward him from King Lot  
And all his host of sea-born men,  
Strong as the strong storm-baffling bird  
Whose cry round Orkney's headlands heard  
Is as the sea's own sovereign word  
That mocks our mortal ken.

For Merlin's craft of prophecy,  
Who wist that one of twain must die,  
Put might in him to say thereby  
Which head should lose its crown, and lie  
Stricken, though loth he were to know

That either life should wane and fail ;  
 Yet most might Arthur's love avail,  
 And still with subtly tempered tale  
 His wile held fast the foe.

With woven words of magic might  
 Wherein the subtle shadow and light  
 Changed hope and fear till fear took flight,  
 He stayed King Lot's fierce lust of fight  
 Till all the wild Welsh war was driven  
 As foam before the wind that wakes  
 With the all-awakening sun, and breaks  
 Strong ships that rue the mirth it makes  
 When grace to slay is given.

And ever hotter lit and higher,  
 As fire that meets encountering fire,  
 Waxed in King Lot his keen desire  
 To bid revenge within him tire

On Arthur's ravaged fame and life :  
 Across the waves of war between  
 Floated and flashed, unseen and seen,  
 The lustrous likeness of the queen  
 Whom shame had sealed his wife.

But when the woful word was brought  
 That while he tarried, doubting nought,  
 The hope was lost whose goal he sought  
 And all the fight he yearned for fought,

His heart was rent for grief and shame,  
 And half his hope was set on flight  
 Till word was given him of a knight  
 Who said : " They are weary and worn with fight.  
 And we more fresh than flame."

And bright and dark as night and day  
 Ere either find the unopening way  
 Clear, and forego the unaltering sway,  
 The sad king's face shone, frowning: "Yea,

I would that every knight of mine  
 Would do his part as I shall do,"  
 He said, "till death or life anew  
 Shall judge between us as is due  
 With wiser doom than thine."

Then thundered all the awakening field  
 With crash of hosts that clashed and reeled,  
 Banner to banner, shield to shield,  
 And spear to splintering spear-shaft, steeled  
 As heart against high heart of man,  
 As hope against high hope of knight  
 To pluck the crest and crown of fight  
 From war's clenched hand by storm's wild light,  
 For blessing given or ban.

All hearts of hearkening men that heard  
 The ban twin-born with blessing, stirred  
 Like springtide waters, knew the word  
 Whereby the steeds of storm are spurred  
 With ravenous rapture to destroy,  
 And laughed for love of battle, pierced  
 With passion of tempestuous thirst  
 And hungering hope to assuage it first  
 With draughts of stormy joy.

But sheer ahead of the iron tide  
 That rocked and roared from side to side  
 Rode as the lightning's lord might ride  
 King Lot, whose heart was set to abide  
 All peril of the raging hour,

And all his host of warriors born  
Where lands by warring seas are worn  
Was only by his hands upborne  
Who gave them pride and power.

But as the sea's hand smites the shore  
And shatters all the strengths that bore  
The ravage earth may bear no more,  
So smote the hand of Pellinore

Charging, a knight of Arthur's chief,  
And clove his strong steed's neck in twain,  
And smote him sheer through brow and brain,  
Falling : and there King Lot lay slain,  
And knew not wrath or grief.

And all the host of Orkney fled,  
And many a mother's son lay dead :  
But when they raised the stricken head  
Whence pride and power and shame were fled

And rage and anguish now cast out,  
And bore it toward a kingly tomb,  
The wife whose love had wrought his doom  
Came thither, fair as morning's bloom  
And dark as twilight's doubt.

And there her four strong sons and his,  
Gawain and Gareth, Gaherys  
And Agravain, whose sword's sharp kiss  
With sound of hell's own serpent's hiss

Should one day turn her life to death,  
Stood mourning with her : but by these  
Seeing Mordred as a seer that sees,  
Anguish of terror bent her knees  
And caught her shuddering breath.

The splendour of her sovereign eyes  
Flashed darkness deeper than the skies  
Feel or fear when the sunset dies  
On his that felt as midnight rise

    Their doom upon them, there undone  
By faith in fear ere thought could yield  
A shadowy sense of days revealed,  
The ravin of the final field,  
    The terror of their son.

For Arthur's, as they caught the light  
That sought and durst not seek his sight,  
Darkened, and all his spirit's might  
Withered within him even as night

    Withers when sunrise thrills the sea.  
But Mordred's lightened as with fire  
That smote his mother and his sire  
With darkling doom and deep desire  
    That bade its darkness be.

And heavier on their hearts the weight  
Sank of the fear that brings forth fate,  
The bitter doubt whose womb is great  
With all the grief and love and hate

    That turn to fire men's days on earth.  
And glorious was the funeral made,  
And dark the deepening dread that swayed  
Their darkening souls whose light grew shade  
    With sense of death in birth.

## VI

IN autumn, when the wind and sea  
 Rejoice to live and laugh to be,  
 And scarce the blast that curbs the tree  
 And bids before it quail and flee

The fiery foliage, where its brand  
 Is radiant as the seal of spring,  
 Sounds less delight, and waves a wing  
 Less lustrous, life's loud thanksgiving  
 Puts life in sea and land.

High hope in Balen's heart alight  
 Laughed, as from all that clamorous fight  
 He passed and sought not Arthur's sight,  
 Who fain had found his kingliest knight

And made amend for Balen's wrong.  
 But Merlin gave his soul to see  
 Fate, rising as a shoreward sea,  
 And all the sorrow that should be  
 Ere hope or fear thought long.

“ O where are they whose hands upbore  
 My battle,” Arthur said, “ before  
 The wild Welsh host's wide rage and roar ?  
 Balen and Balan, Pellinore,

Where are they ? ” Merlin answered him :

“Balen shall be not long away  
From sight of you, but night nor day  
Shall bring his brother back to say  
If life burn bright or dim.”

“Now, by my faith,” said Arthur then,  
“Two marvellous knights are they, whose ken  
Toward battle makes the twain as ten,  
And Balen most of all born men  
Passeth of prowess all I know  
Or ever found or sought to see :  
Would God he would abide with me  
To face the times foretold of thee  
And all the latter woe.”

For there had Merlin shown the king  
The doom that songs unborn should sing,  
The gifts that time should rise and bring  
Of blithe and bitter days to spring  
As weeds and flowers against the sun.  
And on the king for fear’s sake fell  
Sickness, and sorrow deep as hell,  
Nor even might sleep bid fear farewell  
If grace to sleep were won.

Down in a meadow green and still  
He bade the folk that wrought his will  
Pitch his pavilion, where the chill  
Soft night would let not rest fulfil  
His heart wherein dark fears lay deep.  
And sharp against his hearing cast  
Came a sound as of horsehoofs fast  
Passing, that ere their sound were past  
Aroused him as from sleep.

And forth he looked along the grass  
 And saw before his portal pass  
 A knight that wailed aloud, "Alas  
 That life should find this dolorous pass

And find no shield from doom and dole!"  
 And hearing all his moan, "Abide,  
 Fair sir," the king arose and cried,  
 "And say what sorrow bids you ride  
 So sorrowful of soul."

"My hurt may no man heal, God wot,  
 And help of man may speed me not,"  
 The sad knight said, "nor change my lot."  
 And toward the castle of Melyot

Whose towers arose a league away  
 He passed forth sorrowing: and anon,  
 Ere well the woful sight were gone,  
 Came Balen down the meads that shone,  
 Strong, bright, and brave as day.

And seeing the king there stand, the knight  
 Drew rein before his face to alight  
 In reverence made for love's sake bright  
 With joy that set his face alight

As theirs who see, alive, above,  
 The sovereign of their souls, whose name  
 To them is even as love's own flame  
 To enkindle hope that heeds not fame  
 And knows no lord but love.

And Arthur smiled on him, and said,  
 "Right welcome be thou: by my head,  
 I would not wish me better sped.  
 For even but now there came and fled  
 Before me like a cloud that flies

A knight that made most heavy cheer,  
I know not wherefore ; nor may fear  
Or pity give my heart to hear  
    Or lighten on mine eyes.

“ But even for fear’s and pity’s sake  
Fain were I thou shouldst overtake  
And fetch again this knight that spake  
No word of answering grace to make

    Reply to mine that hailed him : thou,  
By force or by goodwill, shalt bring  
His face before me.” “ Yea, my king,”  
Quoth Balen, “ and a greater thing  
    Were less than is my vow.

“ I would the task required and heard  
Were heavier than your sovereign word  
Hath laid on me : ” and thence he spurred  
Elate at heart as youth, and stirred

    With hope as blithe as fires a boy :  
And many a mile he rode, and found  
Far in a forest’s glimmering bound  
The man he sought afar around  
    And seeing took fire for joy.

And with him went a maiden, fair  
As flowers aflush with April air.  
And Balen bade him turn him there  
To tell the king what woes they were

    That bowed him down so sore : and he  
Made woful answer : “ This should do  
Great scathe to me, with nought for you  
Of help that hope might hearken to  
    For boot that may not be.”

And Balen answered : “ I were loth  
To fight as one perforce made wroth  
With one that owes by knighthood’s oath  
One love, one service, and one troth

With me to him whose gracious hand  
Holds fast the helm of knighthood here  
Whereby man’s hope and heart may steer :  
I pray you let not sorrow or fear  
Against his bidding stand.”

The strange knight gazed on him, and spake :  
“ Will you, for Arthur’s royal sake,  
Be warrant for me that I take  
No scathe from strife that man may make ?

Then will I go with you.” And he  
Made joyous answer : “ Yea, for I  
Will be your warrant or will die.”  
And thence they rode with hearts as high  
As men’s that search the sea.

And as by noon’s large light the twain  
Before the tented hall drew rein,  
Suddenly fell the strange knight, slain  
By one that came and went again

And none might see him ; but his spear  
Clove through the body, swift as fire,  
The man whose doom, forefelt as dire,  
Had darkened all his life’s desire,  
As one that death held dear.

And dying he turned his face and said,  
“ Lo now thy warrant that my head  
Should fall not, following forth where led  
A knight whose pledge hath left me dead.  
This darkling manslayer hath to name

Garlon : take thou my goodlier steed,  
 Seeing thine is less of strength and speed,  
 And ride, if thou be knight indeed,  
 Even thither whence we came.

“ And as the maiden’s fair behest  
 Shall bid you follow on my quest,  
 Follow : and when God’s will sees best,  
 Revenge my death, and let me rest

As one that lived and died a knight,  
 Unstained of shame alive or dead.”  
 And Balen, wrung with sorrow, said,  
 “ That shall I do : my hand and head  
 I pledge to do you right.”

And thence with sorrowing heart and cheer  
 He rode, in grief that cast out fear  
 Lest death in darkness yet were near,  
 And bore the truncheon of the spear

Wherewith the woful knight lay slain  
 To her with whom he rode, and she  
 Still bare it with her, fain to see  
 What righteous doom of God’s might be  
 The darkling manslayer’s bane.

And down a dim deep woodland way  
 They rode between the boughs asway  
 With flickering winds whose flash and play  
 Made sunlight sunnier where the day

Laughed, leapt, and fluttered like a bird  
 Caught in a light loose leafy net  
 That earth for amorous heaven had set  
 To hold and see the sundawn yet  
 And hear what morning heard.

There in the sweet soft shifting light  
 Across their passage rode a knight  
 Flushed hot from hunting as from fight,  
 And seeing the sorrow-stricken sight

Made question of them why they rode  
 As mourners sick at heart and sad,  
 When all alive about them bade  
 Sweet earth for heaven's sweet sake be glad  
 As heaven for earth's love glowed.

" Me lists not tell you," Balen said.  
 The strange knight's face grew keen and red ;  
 " Now, might my hand but keep my head,  
 Even here should one of twain lie dead  
 Were he no better armed than I."  
 And Balen spake with smiling speed,  
 Where scorn and courtesy kept heed  
 Of either : " That should little need :  
 Not here shall either die."

And all the cause he told him through  
 As one that feared not though he knew  
 All : and the strange knight spake anew,  
 Saying : " I will part no more from you  
 While life shall last me." So they went  
 Where he might arm himself to ride,  
 And rode across wild ways and wide  
 To where against a churchyard side  
 A hermit's harbour leant.

And there against them riding came  
 Fleet as the lightning's laugh and flame  
 The invisible evil, even the same  
 They sought and might not curse by name  
 As hell's foul child on earth set free,

And smote the strange knight through, and fled,  
And left the mourners by the dead.

“Alas, again,” Sir Balen said,  
“This wrong he hath done to me.”

And there they laid their dead to sleep  
Royally, lying where wild winds keep  
Keen watch and wail more soft and deep  
Than where men’s choirs bid music weep

    And song like incense heave and swell.  
And forth again they rode, and found  
Before them, dire in sight and sound,  
A castle girt about and bound  
    With sorrow like a spell.

Above it seemed the sun at noon  
Sad as a wintry withering moon  
That shudders while the waste wind’s tune  
Craves ever none may guess what boon,

    But all may know the boon for dire.  
And evening on its darkness fell  
More dark than very death’s farewell,  
And night about it hung like hell,  
    Whose fume the dawn made fire.

And Balen lighted down and passed  
Within the gateway, whence no blast  
Rang as the sheer portcullis, cast  
Suddenly down, fell, and made fast

    The gate behind him, whence he spied  
A sudden rage of men without  
And ravin of a murderous rout  
That girt the maiden hard about  
    With death on either side.

And seeing that shame and peril, fear  
 Bade wrath and grief awake and hear  
 What shame should say in fame's wide ear  
 If she, by sorrow sealed more dear

Than joy might make her, so should die :  
 And up the tower's curled stair he sprang  
 As one that flies death's deadliest fang,  
 And leapt right out amid their gang  
 As fire from heaven on high.

And they thereunder seeing the knight  
 Unhurt among their press alight  
 And bare his sword for chance of fight  
 Stood from him, loth to strive or smite,

And bade him hear their woful word,  
 That not the maiden's death they sought ;  
 But there through years too dire for thought  
 Had lain their lady stricken, and nought  
 Might heal her : and he heard.

For there a maiden clean and whole  
 In virgin body and virgin soul,  
 Whose name was writ on royal roll,  
 That would but stain a silver bowl

With offering of her stainless blood,  
 Therewith might heal her : so they stayed  
 For hope's sad sake each blameless maid  
 There journeying in that dolorous shade  
 Whose bloom was bright in bud.

No hurt nor harm to her it were  
 If she should yield a sister there  
 Some tribute of her blood, and fare  
 Forth with this joy at heart to bear,  
 That all unhurt and unafraid

This grace she had here by God's grace wrought.  
And kindling all with kindly thought  
And love that saw save love's self nought,  
Shone, smiled, and spake the maid.

"Good knight of mine, good will have I  
To help this healing though I die."

"Nay," Balen said, "but love may try  
What help in living love may lie.

—I will not lose the life of her  
While my life lasteth." So she gave  
The tribute love was fain to crave,  
But might not heal though fain to save,  
Wore God's grace helpfuller.

Another maid in later Mays  
Won with her life that woful praise,  
And died. But they, when surging day's  
Deep tide fulfilled the dawn's wide ways,  
Rode forth, and found by day or night  
No chance to cross their wayfaring  
Till when they saw the fourth day spring  
A knight's hall gave them harbouring  
Rich as a king's house might.

And while they sat at meat and spake  
Words bright and kind as grace might make  
Sweet for true knighthood's kindly sake,  
They heard a cry beside them break

The still-souled joy of blameless rest.

"What noise is this?" quoth Balen. "Nay,"  
His knightly host made answer, "may  
Our grief not grieve you though I say  
How here I dwell unblest.

“ Not many a day has lived and died  
 Since at a tourney late I tried  
 My strength to smite and turn and ride  
 Against a knight of kinglike pride,

King Pellam’s brother : twice I smote  
 The splendour of his strength to dust :  
 And he, fulfilled of hate’s fierce lust,  
 Swore vengeance, pledged for hell to trust,  
 And keen as hell’s wide throat.

“ Invisible as the spirit of night  
 That heaven and earth in depth and height  
 May see not by the mild moon’s light  
 Nor even when stars would grant them sight,

He walks and slays as plague’s blind breath  
 Slays : and my son, whose anguish here  
 Makes moan perforce that mars our cheer,  
 He wounded, even ere love might fear  
 That hate were strong as death.

“ Nor may my son be whole till he  
 Whose stroke through him hath stricken me  
 Shall give again his blood to be  
 Our healing : yet may no man see

This felon, clothed with darkness round  
 And keen as lightning’s life.” Thereon  
 Spake Balen, and his presence shone  
 Even as the sun’s when stars are gone  
 That hear dawn’s trumpet sound.

“ That knight I know : two knights of mine,  
 Two comrades, sealed by faith’s bright sign,  
 Whose eyes as ours that live should shine,  
 And drink the golden sunlight’s wine

With joy’s thanksgiving that they live,

He hath slain in even the same blind wise :  
Were all wide wealth beneath the skies  
Mine, might I meet him, eyes on eyes,  
All would I laugh to give."

His host made answer, and his gaze  
Grew bright with trust as dawn's moist maze  
With fire : " Within these twenty days,  
King Pellam, lord of Lystenayse,

Holds feast through all this country cried,  
And there before the knightly king  
May no knight come except he bring  
For witness of his wayfaring  
His paramour or bride.

" And there that day, so soon to shine,  
This knight, your feion foe and mine,  
Shall show, full-flushed with bloodred wine,  
The fierce false face whereon we pine

To wreak the wrong he hath wrought us, bare  
As shame should see and brand it." " Then,"  
Said Balen, " shall he give again  
His blood to heal your son, and men  
Shall see death blind him there."

" Forth will we fare to-morrow," said  
His host : and forth, as sunrise led,  
They rode ; and fifteen days were fled  
Ere toward their goal their steeds had sped.

And there alighting might they find  
For Balen's host no place to rest,  
Who came without a gentler guest  
Beside him : and that household's hest  
Bade leave his sword behind.

" Nay," Balen said, " that do I not :  
 My country's custom stands, God wot,  
 That none whose lot is knighthood's lot,  
 To ride where chance as fire is hot

With hope or promise given of fight,  
 Shall fail to keep, for knighthood's part,  
 His weapon with him as his heart ;  
 And as I came will I depart,  
 Or hold herein my right."

Then gat he leave to wear his sword  
 Beside the strange king's festal board  
 Where feasted many a knight and lord  
 In seemliness of fair accord :

And Balen asked of one beside,  
 " Is there not in this court, if fame  
 Keep faith, a knight that hath to name  
 Garlon ? " and saying that word of shame,  
 He scanned that place of pride.

" Yonder he goeth against the light,  
 He with the face as swart as night,"  
 Quoth the other : " but he rides to fight  
 Hid round by charms from all men's sight,

And many a noble knight he hath slain,  
 Being wrapt in darkness deep as hell  
 And silence dark as shame." " Ah, well,"  
 Said Balen, " is that he ? the spell  
 May be the sorcerer's bane."

Then Balen gazed upon him long,  
 And thought, " If here I wreak my wrong,  
 Alive I may not scape, so strong  
 The felon's friends about him throng ;  
 And if I leave him here alive,

This chance perchance may life not give  
 Again : much evil, if he live,  
 He needs must do, should fear forgive  
 When wrongs bid strike and strive."

And Garlon, seeing how Balen's eye  
 Dwelt on him as his heart waxed high  
 With joy in wrath to see him nigh,  
 Rose wolf-like with a wolfish cry

And crossed and smote him on the face,  
 Saying, " Knight, what wouldst thou with me ?  
 Eat,  
 For shame, and gaze not : eat thy meat :  
 Do that thou art come for : stands thy seat  
 Next ours of royal race ? "

" Well hast thou said : thy rede rings true ;  
 That which I came for will I do,"  
 Quoth Balen : forth his fleet sword flew,  
 And clove the head of Garlon through  
 Clean to the shoulders. Then he cried  
 Loud to his lady, " Give me here  
 The truncheon of the shameful spear  
 Wherewith he slew your knight, when fear  
 Bade hate in darkness ride."

And gladly, bright with grief made glad,  
 She gave the truncheon as he bade,  
 For still she bare it with her, sad  
 And strong in hopeless hope she had,  
 Through all dark days of thwarting fear,  
 To see if doom should fall aright  
 And as God's fire-fraught thunder smite  
 That head, clothed round with hell-faced night,  
 Bare now before her here.

And Balen smote therewith the dead  
 Dark felon's body through, and said  
 Aloud, "With even this truncheon, red  
 With baser blood than brave men bled

Whom in thy shameful hand it slew,  
 Thou hast slain a nobler knight, and now  
 It clings and cleaves thy body : thou  
 Shalt cleave again no brave man's brow,  
 Though hell would aid anew."

And toward his host he turned and spake ;  
 "Now for your son's long-suffering sake  
 Blood ye may fetch enough, and take  
 Wherewith to heal his hurt, and make

Death warm as life." Then rose a cry  
 Loud as the wind's when stormy spring  
 Makes all the woodland rage and ring :  
 "Thou hast slain my brother," said the king,  
 "And here with him shalt die."

"Ay ?" Balen laughed him answer. "Well,  
 Do it then thyself." And the answer fell  
 Fierce as a blast of hate from hell,  
 "No man of mine that with me dwell

Shall strike at thee but I their lord  
 For love of this my brother slain."  
 And Pellam caught and grasped amain  
 A grim great weapon, fierce and fain  
 To feed his hungering sword.

And eagerly he smote, and sped  
 Not well : for Balen's blade, yet red  
 With lifeblood of the murderous dead,  
 Between the swordstroke and his head  
 Shone, and the strength of the eager stroke

Shore it in sunder : then the knight,  
 Naked and weaponless for fight,  
 Ran seeking him a sword to smite  
 As hope within him woke.

And so their flight for deathward fast  
 From chamber forth to chamber passed  
 Where lay no weapon, till the last  
 Whose doors made way for Balen cast  
 Upon him as a sudden spell  
 Wonder that even as lightning leapt  
 Across his heart and eyes, and swept  
 As storm across his soul that kept  
 Wild watch, and watched not well.

For there the deed he did, being near  
 Death's danger, breathless as the deer  
 Driven hard to bay, but void of fear,  
 Brought sorrow down for many a year  
 On many a man in many a land.  
 All glorious shone that chamber, bright  
 As burns at sunrise heaven's own height :  
 With cloth of gold the bed was dight,  
 That flamed on either hand.

And one he saw within it lie :  
 A table of all clear gold thereby  
 Stood stately, fair as morning's eye,  
 With four strong silver pillars, high  
 And firm as faith and hope may be :  
 And on it shone the gift he sought,  
 A spear most marvellously wrought,  
 That when his eye and handgrip caught  
 Small fear at heart had he.

Right on King Pellam then, as fire  
 Turns when the thwarting winds wax higher,  
 He turned, and smote him down. So dire  
 The stroke was, when his heart's desire  
 Struck, and had all its fill of hate,  
 That as the king fell swooning down  
 Fell the walls, rent from base to crown,  
 Prone as prone seas that break and drown  
 Ships fraught with doom for freight.

And there for three days' silent space  
 Balen and Pellam face to face  
 Lay dead or deathlike, and the place  
 Was death's blind kingdom, till the grace  
 That God had given the sacred seer  
 For counsel or for comfort led  
 His Merlin thither, and he said,  
 Standing between the quick and dead,  
 "Rise up, and rest not here."

And Balen rose and set his eyes  
 Against the seer's as one that tries  
 His heart against the sea's and sky's  
 And fears not if he lives or dies,  
 Saying, "I would have my damosel,  
 Ere I fare forth, to fare with me."  
 And sadly Merlin answered, "See  
 Where now she lies ; death knows if she  
 Shall now fare ill or well.

"And in this world we meet no more,  
 Balen." And Balen, sorrowing sore,  
 Though fearless yet the heart he bore  
 Beat toward the life that lay before,  
 Rode forth through many a wild waste land

Where men cried out against him, mad  
With grievous faith in fear that bade  
Their wrath make moan for doubt they had  
Lest hell had armed his hand.

For in that chamber's wondrous shrine  
Was part of Christ's own blood, the wine  
Shed of the true triumphal vine  
Whose growth bids earth's deep darkness shine  
As heaven's deep light through the air and sea ;  
That mystery toward our northern shore  
Arimathean Joseph bore  
For healing of our sins of yore,  
That grace even there might be.

And with that spear there shrined apart  
Was Christ's side smitten to the heart.  
And fiercer than the lightning's dart  
The stroke was, and the deathlike smart  
Wherewith, nigh drained of blood and breath,  
The king lay stricken as one long dead :  
And Joseph's was the blood there shed,  
For near akin was he that bled,  
Near even as life to death.

And therefore fell on all that land  
Sorrow : for still on either hand,  
As Balen rode alone and scanned  
Bright fields and cities built to stand

Till time should break them, dead men lay ;  
And loud and long from all their folk  
Living, one cry that cursed him broke ;  
Three countries had his dolorous stroke  
Slain, or should surely slay.

## VII

IN winter, when the year burns low  
 As fire wherein no firebrands glow,  
 And winds dishevel as they blow  
 The lovely stormy wings of snow,

The hearts of northern men burn bright  
 With joy that mocks the joy of spring  
 To hear all heaven's keen clarions ring  
 Music that bids the spirit sing  
 And day give thanks for night.

Aloud and dark as hell or hate  
 Round Balen's head the wind of fate  
 Blew storm and cloud from death's wide gate :  
 But joy as grief in him was great

To face God's doom and live or die,  
 Sorrowing for ill wrought unaware,  
 Rejoicing in desire to dare  
 All ill that innocence might bear  
 With changeless heart and eye.

Yet passing fain he was when past  
 Those lands and woes at length and last.  
 Eight times, as thence he fared forth fast,  
 Dawn rose and even was overcast  
 With starry darkness dear as day,

Before his venturous quest might meet  
Adventure, seeing within a sweet  
Green low-lying forest, hushed in heat,  
A tower that barred his way.

Strong summer, dumb with rapture, bound  
With golden calm the woodlands round  
Wherethrough the knight forth faring found  
A knight that on the greenwood ground  
Sat mourning : fair he was to see,  
And moulded as for love or fight  
A maiden's dreams might frame her knight ;  
But sad in joy's far-flowering sight  
As grief's blind thrall might be.

"God save you," Balen softly said,  
"What grief bows down your heart and head  
Thus, as one sorrowing for his dead ?  
Tell me, if haply I may stead  
In aught your sorrow, that I may."  
"Sir knight," that other said, "thy word  
Makes my grief heavier than I heard."  
And pity and wonder inly stirred  
Drew Balen thence away.

And so withdrawn with silent speed  
He saw the sad knight's stately steed,  
A war-horse meet for warrior's need,  
That none who passed might choose but heed,  
So strong he stood, so great, so fair,  
With eyes afire for flight or fight,  
A joy to look on, mild in might,  
And swift and keen and kind as light,  
And all as clear of care.

And Balen, gazing on him, heard  
 Again his master's woful word  
 Sound sorrow through the calm unstirred  
 By fluttering wind or flickering bird,

Thus : " Ah, fair lady and faithless, why  
 Break thy pledged faith to meet me ? soon  
 An hour beyond thy trothplight noon  
 Shall strike my death-bell, and thy boon  
 Is this, that here I die.

" My curse for all thy gifts may be  
 Heavier than death or night on thee ;  
 For now this sword thou gavest me  
 Shall set me from thy bondage free."

And there the man had died self-slain,  
 But Balen leapt on him and caught  
 The blind fierce hand that fain had wrought  
 Self-murder, stung with fire of thought,  
 As rage makes anguish fain.

Then, mad for thwarted grief, " Let go  
 My hand," the fool of wrath and woe  
 Cried, " or I slay thee." Scarce the glow  
 In Balen's cheek and eye might show,

As dawn shows day while seas lie chill,  
 He heard, though pity took not heed,  
 But smiled and spake, " That shall not need :  
 What man may do to bid you speed  
 I, so God speed me, will."

And the other craved his name, beguiled  
 By hope that made his madness mild.  
 Again Sir Balen spake and smiled :  
 " My name is Balen, called the Wild  
 By knights whom kings and courts make tame,

Because I ride alone afar  
And follow but my soul for star."

" Ah, sir, I know the knight you are  
    And all your fiery fame.

" The knight that bears two swords I know,  
Most praised of all men, friend and foe,  
For prowess of your hands, that show  
Dark war the way where balefires glow  
    And kindle glory like the dawn's."

So spake the sorrowing knight, and stood  
As one whose heart fresh hope made good :  
And forth they rode by wold and wood  
    And down the glimmering lawns.

And Balen craved his name who rode  
Beside him, where the wild wood glowed  
With joy to feel how noontide flowed  
Through glade and glen and rough green road  
    Till earth grew joyful as the sea.

" My name is Garnysshe of the Mount,  
A poor man's son of none account,"  
He said, " where springs of loftier fount  
    Laugh loud with pride to be.

" But strength in weakness lives and stands  
As rocks that rise through shifting sands ;  
And for the prowess of my hands  
One made me knight and gave me lands,  
    Duke Hermel, lord from far to near,  
Our prince ; and she that loved me—she  
I love, and deemed she loved but me,  
His daughter, pledged her faith to be  
    Ere now beside me here."

And Balen, brief of speech as light  
 Whose word, beheld of depth and height,  
 Strikes silence through the stars of night,  
 Spake, and his face as dawn's grew bright,  
 For hope to help a happier man,  
 "How far then lies she hence?" "By this,"  
 Her lover sighed and said, "I wis,  
 Not six fleet miles the passage is,  
 And straight as thought could span."

So rode they swift and sure, and found  
 A castle walled and dyked around :  
 And Balen, as a warrior bound  
 On search where hope might fear to sound  
 The darkness of the deeps of doubt,  
 Made entrance through the guardless gate  
 As life, while hope in life grows great,  
 Makes way between the doors of fate  
 That death may pass thereout.

Through many a glorious chamber, wrought  
 For all delight that love's own thought  
 Might dream or dwell in, Balen sought  
 And found of all he looked for nought,  
 For like a shining shell her bed  
 Shone void and vacant of her : thence  
 Through devious wonders bright and dense  
 He passed and saw with shame-struck sense  
 Where shame and faith lay dead.

Down in a sweet small garden, fair  
 With flowerful joy in the ardent air,  
 He saw, and raged with loathing, where  
 She lay with love-dishevelled hair  
 Beneath a broad bright laurel tree

And clasped in amorous arms a knight,  
 The unloveliest that his scornful sight  
 Had dwelt on yet ; a shame the bright  
 Broad noon might shrink to see.

And thence in wrathful hope he turned,  
 Hot as the heart within him burned,  
 To meet the knight whose love, so spurned  
 And spat on and made nought of, yearned

And dreamed and hoped and lived in vain,  
 And said, "I have found her sleeping fast,"  
 And led him where the shadows cast  
 From leaves wherethrough light winds ran past  
 Screened her from sun and rain.

But Garnysshe, seeing, reeled as he stood  
 Like a tree, kingliest of the wood,  
 Half hewn through : and the burning blood  
 Through lips and nostrils burst aflood :

And gathering back his rage and might  
 As broken breakers rally and roar  
 The loud wind down that drives off shore,  
 He smote their heads off : there no more  
 Their life might shame the light.

Then turned he back toward Balen, mad  
 With grief, and said, "The grief I had  
 Was nought : ere this my life was glad :  
 Thou hast done this deed : I was but sad

And fearful how my hope might fare :  
 I had lived my sorrow down, hadst thou  
 Not shown me what I saw but now."  
 The sorrow and scorn on Balen's brow  
 Bade silence curb him there.

And Balen answered : "What I did  
I did to hearten thee and bid  
Thy courage know that shame should rid  
A man's high heart of love that hid

Blind shame within its core : God knows,  
I did, to set a bondman free,  
But as I would thou hadst done by me,  
That seeing what love must die to see  
Love's end might well be woe's."

"Alas," the woful weakling said,  
"I have slain what most I loved : I have shed  
The blood most near my heart : the head  
Lies cold as earth, defiled and dead,  
That all my life was lighted by,  
That all my soul bowed down before,  
And now may bear with life no more :  
For now my sorrow that I bore  
Is twofold, and I die."

Then with his red wet sword he rove  
His breast in sunder, where it clove  
Life, and no pulse against it strove,  
So sure and strong the deep stroke drove

Deathward : and Balen, seeing him dead,  
Rode thence, lest folk would say he had slain  
Those three : and ere three days again  
Had seen the sun's might wax and wane,  
Far forth he had spurred and sped.

And riding past a cross whereon  
Broad golden letters written shone,  
Saying, "No knight born may ride alone  
Forth toward this castle," and all the stone  
Glowed in the sun's glare even as though

Blood stained it from the crucified  
Dead burden of one that there had died,  
An old hoar man he saw beside  
Whose face was wan as woe.

“Balen the Wild,” he said, “this way  
Thy way lies not : thou hast passed to-day  
Thy bands : but turn again, and stay  
Thy passage, while thy soul hath sway  
Within thee, and through God’s good power  
It will avail thee :” and anon  
His likeness as a cloud was gone,  
And Balen’s heart within him shone  
Clear as the cloudless hour.

Nor fate nor fear might overcast  
The soul now near its peace at last.  
Suddenly, thence as forth he past,  
A mighty and a deadly blast

Blown of a hunting-horn he heard,  
As when the chase hath nobly sped.  
“That blast is blown for me,” he said,  
“The prize am I who am yet not dead,”  
And smiled upon the word.

As toward a royal hart’s death rang  
That note, whence all the loud wood sang  
With winged and living sound that sprang  
Like fire, and keen as fire’s own fang  
Pierced the sweet silence that it slew.  
But nought like death or strife was here :  
Fair semblance and most goodly cheer  
They made him, they whose troop drew near  
As death among them drew.

A hundred ladies well arrayed  
 And many a knight well weaponed made  
 That kindly show of cheer : the glade  
 Shone round them till its very shade

Lightened and laughed from grove to lawn  
 To hear and see them : so they brought  
 Within a castle fair as thought  
 Could dream that wizard hands had wrought  
 The guest among them drawn.

All manner of glorious joy was there :  
 Harping and dancing, loud and fair,  
 And minstrelsy that made of air  
 Fire, so like fire its raptures were.

Then the chief lady spake on high :  
 "Knight with the two swords, one of two  
 Must help you here or fall from you :  
 For needs you now must have ado  
 And joust with one hereby.

"A good knight guards an island here  
 Against all swords that chance brings near,  
 And there with stroke of sword and spear  
 Must all for whom these halls make cheer  
 Fight, and redeem or yield up life."

"An evil custom," Balen said,  
 "Is this, that none whom chance hath led  
 Hither, if knighthood crown his head,  
 May pass unstirred to strife."

"You shall not have ado to fight  
 Here save against one only knight,"  
 She said, and all her face grew bright  
 As hell-fire, lit with hungry light  
 That wicked laughter touched with flame.

“ Well, since I shall thereto,” said he,  
“ I am ready at heart as death for me :  
Fain would I be where death should be  
    And life should lose its name.

“ But travelling men whose goal afar  
Shines as a cloud-constraining star  
Are often weary, and wearier are  
Their steeds that feel each fret and jar

    Wherewith the wild ways wound them : yet,  
Albeit my horse be weary, still  
My heart is nowise weary ; will  
Sustains it even till death fulfil  
    My trust upon him set.”

“ Sir,” said a knight thereby that stood,  
“ Meseems your shield is now not good  
But worn with warrior work, nor could  
Sustain in strife the strokes it would :

    A larger will I lend you.” “ Ay,  
Thereof I thank you,” Balen said,  
Being single of heart as one that read  
No face aright whence faith had fled,  
    Nor dreamed that faith could fly.

And so he took that shield unknown  
And left for treason’s touch his own,  
And toward that island rode alone,  
Nor heard the blast against him blown

    Sound in the wind’s and water’s sound,  
But hearkening toward the stream’s edge heard  
Nought save the soft stream’s rippling word,  
Glad with the gladness of a bird,  
    That sang to the air around.

And there against the water-side  
 He saw, fast moored to rock and ride,  
 A fair great boat anear abide  
 Like one that waits the turning tide,

Wherein embarked his horse and he  
 Passed over toward no kindly strand :  
 And where they stood again on land  
 There stood a maiden hard at hand  
 Who seeing them wept to see.

And “ O knight Balen,” was her cry,  
 “ Why have ye left your own shield ? why  
 Come hither out of time to die ?  
 For had ye kept your shield, thereby

Ye had yet been known, and died not here.  
 Great pity it is of you this day  
 As ever was of knight, or may  
 Be ever, seeing in war’s bright way  
 Praise knows not Balen’s peer.”

And Balen said, “ Thou hast heard my name  
 Right : it repenteth me, though shame  
 May tax me not with base men’s blame,  
 That ever, hap what will, I came

Within this country ; yet, being come,  
 For shame I may not turn again  
 Now, that myself and nobler men  
 May scorn me : now is more than then,  
 And faith bids fear be dumb.

“ Be it life or death, my chance I take,  
 Be it life’s to build or death’s to break :  
 And fall what may, me lists not make  
 Moan for sad life’s or death’s sad sake.”

Then looked he on his armour, glad

And high of heart, and found it strong :  
 And all his soul became a song  
 And soared in prayer that soared not long,  
 For all the hope it had.

Then saw he whence against him came  
 A steed whose trappings shone like flame,  
 And he that rode him showed the same  
 Fierce colour, bright as fire or fame,  
 But dark the visors were as night  
 That hid from Balen Balan's face,  
 And his from Balan : God's own grace  
 Forsook them for a shadowy space  
 Where darkness cast out light.

The two swords girt that Balen bare  
 Gave Balan for a breath's while there  
 Pause, wondering if indeed it were  
 Balen his brother, bound to dare  
 The chance of that unhappy quest :  
 But seeing not as he thought to see  
 His shield, he deemed it was not he,  
 And so, as fate bade sorrow be,  
 They laid their spears in rest.

So mighty was the course they ran  
 With spear to spear so great of span,  
 Each fell back stricken, man by man,  
 Horse by horse, borne down : so the ban  
 That wrought by doom against them wrought :  
 But Balen by his falling steed  
 Was bruised the sorer, being indeed  
 Way-weary, like a rain-bruised reed,  
 With travel ere he fought.

And Balen rose again from swoon  
First, and went toward him : all too soon  
He too then rose, and the evil boon  
Of strength came back, and the evil tune  
    Of battle unnatural made again  
Mad music as for death's wide ear  
Listening and hungering toward the near  
Last sigh that life or death might hear  
    At last from dying men.

Balan smote Balen first, and clove  
His lifted shield that rose and strove  
In vain against the stroke that drove  
Down : as the web that morning wove  
    Of glimmering pearl from spray to spray  
Dies when the strong sun strikes it, so  
Shrank the steel, tempered thrice to show  
Strength, as the mad might of the blow  
    Shore Balen's helm away.

Then turning as a turning wave  
Against the land-wind, blind and brave  
In hope that dreams despair may save,  
With even the unhappy sword that gave  
    The gifts of fame and fate in one  
He smote his brother, and there had nigh  
Felled him : and while they breathed, his eye  
Glanced up, and saw beneath the sky  
    Sights fairer than the sun.

The towers of all the castle there  
Stood full of ladies, blithe and fair  
As the earth beneath and the amorous air  
About them and above them were :  
    So toward the blind and fateful fight

Again those brethren went, and sore  
 Were all the strokes they smote and bore,  
 And breathed again, and fell once more  
 To battle in their sight.

With blood that either spilt and bled  
 Was all the ground they fought on red,  
 And each knight's hauberk hewn and shred  
 Left each unmailed and naked, shed

From off them even as mantles cast :  
 And oft they breathed, and drew but breath  
 Brief as the word strong sorrow saith,  
 And poured and drank the draught of death,  
 Till fate was full at last.

And Balan, younger born than he  
 Whom darkness bade him slay, and be  
 Slain, as in mist where none may see  
 If aught abide or fall or flee,

Drew back a little and laid him down,  
 Dying : but Balen stood, and said,  
 As one between the quick and dead  
 Might stand and speak, "What good knight's head  
 Hath won this mortal crown ?

" What knight art thou ? for never I  
 Who now beside thee dead shall die  
 Found yet the knight afar or nigh  
 That matched me." Then his brother's eye

Flashed pride and love ; he spake and smiled  
 And felt in death life's quickening flame,  
 And answered : " Balan is my name,  
 The good knight Balen's brother ; fame  
 Calls and miscalls him wild."

The cry from Balen's lips that sprang  
 Sprang sharper than his sword's stroke rang.  
 More keen than death's or memory's fang,  
 Through sense and soul the shuddering pang

Shivered : and scarce he had cried, " Alas  
 That ever I should see this day,"  
 When sorrow swooned from him away  
 As blindly back he fell, and lay  
 Where sleep lets anguish pass.

But Balan rose on hands and knees  
 And crawled by childlike dim degrees  
 Up toward his brother, as a breeze  
 Creeps wingless over slaggard seas

When all the wind's heart fails it : so  
 Beneath their mother's eyes had he,  
 A babe that laughed with joy to be,  
 Made toward him standing by her knee  
 For love's sake long ago.

Then, gathering strength up for a space,  
 From off his brother's dying face  
 With dying hands that wrought apace  
 While death and life would grant them grace

He loosed his helm and knew not him,  
 So scored with blood it was, and hewn  
 Athwart with darkening wounds : but soon  
 Life strove and shuddered through the swoon  
 Wherein its light lay dim.

And sorrow set these chained words free :  
 " O Balan, O my brother ! me  
 Thou hast slain, and I, my brother, thee :  
 And now far hence, on shore and sea,  
 Shall all the wide world speak of us."

“ Alas,” said Balan, “ that I might  
 Not know you, seeing two swords were dight  
 About you ; now the unanswering sight  
 Hath here found answer thus.

“ Because you bore another shield  
 Than yours, that even ere youth could wield  
 Like arms with manhood’s tried and steelea  
 Shone as my star of battle-field,

I deemed it surely might not be  
 My brother.” Then his brother spake  
 Fiercely : “ Would God, for thy sole sake,  
 I had my life again, to take  
 Revenge for only thee !

“ For all this deadly work was wrought  
 Of one false knight’s false word and thought.  
 Whose mortal craft and counsel caught  
 And snared my faith who doubted nought,

And made me put my shield away.  
 Ah, might I live, I would destroy  
 That castle for its customs : joy  
 There makes of grief a deadly toy,  
 And death makes night of day.”

“ Well done were that, if aught were done  
 Well ever here beneath the sun,”  
 Said Balan : “ better work were none :  
 For hither since I came and won  
 A woful honour born of death,  
 When here my hap it was to slay  
 A knight who kept this island way,  
 I might not pass by night or day  
 Hence, as this token saith.

"No more shouldst thou, for all the might  
 Of heart and hand that seals thee knight  
 Most noble of all that see the light,  
 Brother, hadst thou but slain in fight  
 Me, and arisen unscathed and whole,  
 As would to God thou hadst risen ! though here  
 Light is as darkness, hope as fear,  
 And love as hate : and none draws near  
 Save toward a mortal goal."

Then, fair as any poison-flower  
 Whose blossom blights the withering bower  
 Whereon its blasting breath has power,  
 Forth fared the lady of the tower  
 With many a lady and many a knight,  
 And came across the water-way  
 Even where on death's dim border lay  
 Those brethren sent of her to slay  
 And die in kindless fight.

And all those hard light hearts were swayed  
 With pity passing like a shade  
 That stays not, and may be not stayed,  
 To hear the mutual moan they made,  
 Each to behold his brother die,  
 Saying, "Both we came out of one tomb,  
 One star-crossed mother's woful womb,  
 And so within one grave-pit's gloom  
 Untimely shall we lie."

And Balan prayed, as God should bless  
 That lady for her gentleness,  
 That where the battle's mortal stress  
 Had made for them perforce to press  
 The bed whence never man may rise

They twain, free now from hopes and fears,  
 Might sleep ; and she, as one that hears,  
 Bowed her bright head : and very tears  
 Fell from her cold fierce eyes.

Then Balen prayed her send a priest  
 To housel them, that ere they ceased  
 The hansel of the heavenly feast  
 That fills with light from the answering east  
     The sunset of the life of man  
 Might bless them, and their lips be kissed  
 With death's requickening eucharist,  
 And death's and life's dim sunlit mist  
     Pass as a stream that ran.

And so their dying rites were done :  
 And Balen, seeing the death-struck sun  
 Sink, spake as he whose goal is won :  
 " Now, when our trophied tomb is one,  
     And over us our tale is writ,  
 How two that loved each other, two  
 Born and begotten brethren, slew  
 Each other, none that reads anew  
     Shall choose but weep for it.

" And no good knight and no good man  
 Whose eye shall ever come to scan  
 The record of the imperious ban  
 That made our life so sad a span  
     Shall read or hear, who shall not pray  
 For us for ever." Then anon  
 Died Balan ; but the sun was gone,  
 And deep the stars of midnight shone,  
     Ere Balen passed away.

And there low lying, as hour on hour  
Fled, all his life in all its flower  
Came back as in a sunlit shower  
Of dreams, when sweet-souled sleep has power

    On life less sweet and glad to be.

He drank the draught of life's first wine  
Again : he saw the moorland shine,  
The rioting rapids of the Tyne,  
    The woods, the cliffs, the sea.

The joy that lives at heart and home,  
The joy to rest, the joy to roam,  
The joy of crags and scaurs he clomb,  
The rapture of the encountering foam

    Embraced and breasted of the boy,  
The first good steed his knees bestrode,  
The first wild sound of songs that flowed  
Through ears that thrilled and heart that glowed,

    Fulfilled his death with joy.

So, dying not as a coward that dies  
And dares not look in death's dim eyes  
Straight as the stars on seas and skies  
Whence moon and sun recoil and rise,

    He looked on life and death, and slept.  
And there with morning Merlin came,  
And on the tomb that told their fame  
He wrote by Balan's Balen's name,  
    And gazed thereon, and wept.

For all his heart within him yearned  
With pity like as fire that burned.  
The fate his fateful eye discerned  
Far off now dimmed it, ere he turned  
    His face toward Camelot, to tell

Arthur of all the storms that woke  
Round Balen, and the dolorous stroke,  
And how that last blind battle broke  
The consummated spell.

“ Alas,” King Arthur said, “ this day  
I have heard the worst that woe might say :  
For in this world that wanes away  
I know not two such knights as they.”

This is the tale that memory writes  
Of men whose names like stars shall stand,  
Balen and Balan, sure of hand,  
Two brethren of Northumberland,  
In life and death good knights.



# ATALANTA IN CALYDON

A TRAGEDY

Toὺς ζῶντας εὖ δρᾶν· κατθανῶν δὲ πᾶς ἀνὴρ  
Γῆ καὶ σκιά· τὸ μηδὲν εἰς οὐδὲν ῥέπει

EUR. *Fr. Mel.* 20 (537)



TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

I NOW DEDICATE, WITH EQUAL AFFECTION, REVERENCE, AND REGRET, A  
POEM INSCRIBED TO HIM WHILE YET ALIVE IN WORDS WHICH ARE NOW  
RETAINED BECAUSE THEY WERE LAID BEFORE HIM ; AND TO WHICH, RATHER  
THAN CANCEL THEM, I HAVE ADDED SUCH OTHERS AS WERE EVOKED BY  
THE NEWS OF HIS DEATH : THAT THOUGH LOSING THE PLEASURE I MAY  
NOT LOSE THE HONOUR OF INSCRIBING IN FRONT OF MY WORK THE HIGHEST  
OF CONTEMPORARY NAMES.



φέρει δὴ Βορέηθεν ἀπότροπος' ἀλλά σε Νυμφαι  
ἥγαγον ἀσπασίαν ἡδύπνουοι καθ' ἄλα,  
πληροῦσαι μέλιτος θεόθεν στόμα, μή τι Ποσειδῶν  
βλάψῃ, ἐν ὧσὶν ἔχων σὴν μελίγηρυν ὅπα.  
τοῖος ἀοιδὸς ἔφυς· ἡμεῖς δ' ἔτι κλαίομεν, οὐ σου  
δευόμεθ' οἰχομένου, καὶ σε ποθοῦμεν ἀεί.  
εἴπε δὲ Πιερίδων τις ἀναστρεφθεῖσα πρὸς ἄλλην  
ἡλθεν, ἴδοὺ, πάντων φίλατος ἡλθε βροτῶν,  
στεμματα δρεψάμενος νεοθηλέα χερσὶ γεραιαῖς,  
καὶ πολιδὸν δάφναις ἀμφεκάλυψε κάρα,  
ἡδύ τι Σικελικαῖς ἐπὶ πηκτίσιν, ἡδύ τι χόρδαις,  
ἀσόμενος πολλὴν γάρ μετέβαλλε λύραν,  
πολλάκι δ' ἐν βήσσαισι καθήμενον εὗρεν Ἀπόλλων,  
ἀνθεσι δ' ἔστεψεν, τερπνὰ δ' ἔδωκε λέγειν,  
Πᾶνα τ' ἀείμνηστόν τε Πίτυν Κόρυθόν τε δύσεδρον,  
ἥν τ' ἐφίλησε θεὰν θυητὸς Ἄμαδρύαδα.  
πόντου δ' ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐκοίμισε Κυμοδάμειαν,  
τήν τ' Ἀγαμέμνονίαν παῖδ' ἀπέδωκε πατρὶ,  
πρὸς δ' ἱεροὺς Δελφοὺς θεόπληκτον ἔπειμψεν Ὁρέστην  
τειρόμενον στυγερᾶς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα θεαῖς.



φχεο δὴ καὶ ἀνευθε φίλων καὶ ἀνευθεν ἀοιδῆς,  
δρεψόμενος μαλακῆς ἀνθεα Περσεφόνης.  
φχεο· κούκ ἔτ' ἔσει, κούκ αὖ ποτέ σοι παρεδοῦμαι  
ἀζόμενος, χειρῶν χερσὶ θιγάνων δσίαις·  
νῦν δ' αὖ μνησάμενον γλυκύπικρος ὑπήλυσθεν αἰδῶς,  
οἵα τυχῶν οἴου πρὸς σέθεν οἶος ἔχω·  
οὕποτε σοῖς, γέρον, ὅμμα φίλοις φίλον ὅμμασι τέρψω,  
σῆς, γέρον, ἀψάμενος, φίλτατε, δεξιτερᾶς.  
ἢ ψαφαρὰ κόνις, ἢ ψαφαρὸς βιός ἐστι τί τούτων  
μείον ἐφημερίων; οὐ κόνις ἀλλὰ βίος.  
ἀλλὰ μοι ἡδύτερός γε πέλεις πολὺ τῶν ἔτ' ἐόντων,  
ἔπλεο γάρ· σοι μὴν ταῦτα θανόντι φέρω,  
παῦρα μὲν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ κῆρος ἐτήτυμα· μηδ' ἀποτρεφθῆς,  
πρὸς δὲ βαλῶν ἔτι νῦν ἥσυχον ὅμμα δέχουν.  
οὐ γὰρ ἔχω, μέγα δὴ τι θέλων, σέθεν ἄξια δοῦναι,  
θαπτομένου περ ἀπών· οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστιν ἔμοι·  
οὐδὲ μελικρήτου παρέχειν γάνος· εἰ γὰρ ἐνείη  
καὶ σε χεροῦν ψαύσαι καὶ σέ ποτ' αὐθις ἵδεῖν,  
δάκρυσί τε σπουνδαῖς τε κάρα φίλον ἀμφιπολεύειν  
δόφθαλμούς θ' ἱεροὺς σοὺς ἱερόν τε δέμας.  
εἰθ' ὅφελον· μάλα γὰρ τάδ' ἀν ἀμπαύσειε μερίμνης·  
νῦν δὲ πρόσωθεν ἀνευ σήματος οἰκτον ἄγω·  
οὐδ' ἐπιτυμβίδιον θρηνῶ μέλος, ἀλλ' ἀπαμυνθεὶς,  
ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθεν ἔχων ἀμφιδακρυτὰ πάθη.  
ἀλλὰ σὺ χαῖρε θανῶν, καὶ ἔχων γέρας ζσθι πρὸς ἀνδρῶν  
πρὸς τε θεῶν, ἐνέροις εἴ τις ἔπεστι θεός.  
χαῖρε γέρον, φίλε χαῖρε πατέρ, πολὺ φέρτατ' ἀοιδῶν  
ῶν ἴδομεν, πολὺ δὴ φέρτατ' ἀεισομένων·  
χαῖρε, καὶ ὅλβον ἔχοις, οἴον γε θανόντες ἔχουσιν,  
ἥσυχίαν ἔχθρας καὶ φιλότητος ἀτερ.

σήματος οἰχομένου σοι μνῆματ' ἐσ τερον ἔσται,  
σοί τε φιλὴ μνῆμη μνήματος οἰχομένου·  
δν Χάριτες κλαίουσι θεαὶ, κλαίει δὲ Ἀφροδίτη  
καλλιχόροις Μουσῶν τερψαμένη στεφάνοις.  
οὐ γὰρ ἄπαξ ἵερούς ποτε γῆρας ἔτριψεν ἀοιδούς·  
τήνδε τὸ σὸν φαίνει μνῆμα τόδ' ἀγλαῖαν.  
ἢ φίλος ἡς μακάρεσσι βροτὸς, σοὶ δὲ εἴ τινι Νύμφαι  
δῶρα ποθεινὰ νέμειν, ύστατα δῶρον, ἔδοσαν.  
τὰς νῦν χάλκεος ὑπνος ἔβη καὶ ἀνήνεμος αἰών,  
καὶ συνθαπτομέναι μοῖραν ἔχουσι μίαν.  
εὗδεις καὶ σὺ, καλὸν καὶ ἀγάλματον ἐν χθονὶ κοίλῃ  
ὑπνον ἐφικόμενος, σῆς ἀπόνοσφι πάτρας,  
τῆλε παρὰ ξανθοῦ Τυρσηνικὸν οἶδμα καθεύδεις  
νάματος, ἢ δὲ ἔτι σὴ μᾶλά σε γαῖα ποθεῖ,  
ἀλλ' ἀπέχεις, καὶ πρόσθε φιλόπτολις ὃν περ ἀπεῖπας·  
εὗδε· μάκαρ δὲ ἡμῖν οὐδὲ ἀμέγαρτος ἔσει.  
βαιὸς ἐπιχθονίων γε χρόνος καὶ μοῖρα κρατήσει,  
τοὺς δέ ποτε εὐφροσύνη τοὺς δέ ποτε ἄλγος ἔχει  
πολλάκι δὲ ἢ βλάπτει φάσι ἢ σκότος ἀμφικαλύπτει  
μυρομένους, δάκνει δὲ ὑπνος ἐγρηγορότας·  
οὐδὲ ἔθε δέ τε ἐν τύμβοισι κατέδραθεν δύμα θαυμάτων  
ἢ σκότος ἢ τι φάσι δήξεται ἡελίου·  
οὐδὲ δύναρ ἐννύχιον καὶ ἐνύπνιον οὐδὲ ὑπάρ ἔσται  
ἢ ποτε τερπομένοις ἢ ποτε δδυρομένοις·  
ἀλλ' ἔνα πάντες ἀεὶ θάκον συνέχουσι καὶ ἔδραν  
ἀντὶ βροτῆς ἄβροτον, κάλλιστον ἄντι κακῆς.

## THE ARGUMENT

ALTHÆA, daughter of Thestius and Eurythemis, queen of Calydon, being with child of Meleager her first-born son, dreamed that she brought forth a brand burning ; and upon his birth came the three Fates and prophesied of him three things, namely these ; that he should have great strength of his hands, and good fortune in this life, and that he should live no longer when the brand then in the fire were consumed : wherefore his mother plucked it forth and kept it by her. And the child being a man grown sailed with Jason after the fleece of gold, and won himself great praise of all men living ; and when the tribes of the north and west made war upon Ætolia, he fought against their army and scattered it. But Artemis, having at the first stirred up these tribes to war against Æneus king of Calydon, because he had offered sacrifice to all the gods saving her alone, but her he had forgotten to honour, was yet more wroth because of the destruction of this army, and sent upon the land of Calydon a wild boar which slew many and wasted all their increase, but him could none slay, and many went against him and perished. Then were all the chief men of Greece gathered together, and among them Atalanta daughter of Iasius the Arcadian, a virgin ; for whose sake Artemis let slay the boar, seeing she favoured the

maiden greatly ; and Meleager having despatched it gave the spoil thereof to Atalanta, as one beyond measure enamoured of her ; but the brethren of Althæa his mother, Toxeus and Plexippus, with such others as disliked that she only should bear off the praise whereas many had borne the labour, laid wait for her to take away her spoil ; but Meleager fought against them and slew them : whom when Althæa their sister beheld and knew to be slain of her son, she waxed for wrath and sorrow like as one mad, and taking the brand whereby the measure of her son's life was meted to him, she cast it upon a fire ; and with the wasting thereof his life likewise wasted away, that being brought back to his father's house he died in a brief space ; and his mother also endured not long after for very sorrow ; and this was his end, and the end of that hunting.

## THE PERSONS

CHIEF HUNTSMAN  
CHORUS  
ALTHÆA  
MELEAGER  
ŒNEUS  
ATALANTA  
TOXEUS  
PLEXIPPUS  
HERALD  
MESSENGER  
SECOND MESSENGER

Ἴστω δ' ὅστις οὐχ ὑπόπτερος  
φροντίσιν δαεὶς,  
τὰν ᾧ παιδολύμας τάλαινα Θεσπιὰς μήσατο  
πυρδαῆ τινα πρόνοιαν,  
καταίθουσα παιδὸς δαφοιγδν  
δαλὸν ἥλικ', ἐπεὶ μολὼν  
ματρόθεν κελάδησε;  
σύμμετρόν τε διαὶ βίου  
μοιρόκραντον ἔσ ἄμαρ.

ÆSCH. Cho. 602-612.

## ATALANTA IN CALYDON

### CHIEF HUNTSMAN

MAIDEN, and mistress of the months and stars  
Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven,  
Goddess whom all gods love with threefold heart,  
Being treble in thy divided deity,  
A light for dead men and dark hours, a foot  
Swift on the hills as morning, and a hand  
To all things fierce and fleet that roar and range  
Mortal, with gentler shafts than snow or sleep ;  
Hear now and help and lift no violent hand,  
But favourable and fair as thine eye's beam  
Hidden and shown in heaven ; for I all night  
Amid the king's hounds and the hunting men  
Have wrought and worshipped toward thee ; nor  
shall man  
See goodlier hounds or deadlier edge of spears ;  
But for the end, that lies unreached at yet  
Between the hands and on the knees of gods.  
O fair-faced sun, killing the stars and dews  
And dreams and desolation of the night !  
Rise up, shine, stretch thine hand out, with thy bow  
Touch the most dimmest height of trembling heaven,  
And burn and break the dark about thy ways,  
Shot through and through with arrows ; let thine hair  
Lighten as flame above that flameless shell  
Which was the moon, and thine eyes fill the world

And thy lips kindle with swift beams ; let earth  
Laugh, and the long sea fiery from thy feet  
Through all the roar and ripple of streaming springs  
And foam in reddening flakes and flying flowers  
Shaken from hands and blown from lips of nymphs  
Whose hair or breast divides the wandering wave  
With salt close tresses cleaving lock to lock,  
All gold, or shuddering and unfurrowed snow ;  
And all the winds about thee with their wings,  
And fountain-heads of all the watered world ;  
Each horn of Acheloüs, and the green  
Euenus, wedded with the straitening sea.  
For in fair time thou comest ; come also thou,  
Twin-born with him, and virgin, Artemis,  
And give our spears their spoil, the wild boar's hide,  
Sent in thine anger against us for sin done  
And bloodless altars without wine or fire.  
Him now consume thou ; for thy sacrifice  
With sanguine-shining steam divides the dawn,  
And one, the maiden rose of all thy maids,  
Arcadian Atalanta, snowy-souled,  
Fair as the snow and footed as the wind,  
From Ladon and well-wooded Mænalus  
Over the firm hills and the fleeting sea  
Hast thou drawn hither, and many an armèd king,  
Heroes, the crown of men, like gods in fight.  
Moreover out of all the Ætolian land,  
From the full-flowered Lelantian pasturage  
To what of fruitful field the son of Zeus  
Won from the roaring river and labouring sea  
When the wild god shrank in his horn and fled  
And foamed and lessened through his wrathful fords,  
Leaving clear lands that steamed with sudden sun,  
These virgins with the lightening of the day

Bring thee fresh wreaths and their own sweeter hair,  
 Luxurious locks and flower-like mixed with flowers,  
 Clean offering, and chaste hymns ; but me the time  
 Divides from these things ; whom do thou not less  
 Help and give honour, and to mine hounds good speed,  
 And edge to spears, and luck to each man's hand.

## CHORUS

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,  
 The mother of months in meadow or plain  
 Fills the shadows and windy places  
 With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain ;  
 And the brown bright nightingale amorous  
 Is half assuaged for Itylus,  
 For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,  
 The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,  
 Maiden most perfect, lady of light,  
 With a noise of winds and many rivers,  
 With a clamour of waters, and with might ;  
 Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,  
 Over the splendour and speed of thy feet ;  
 For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,  
 Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,  
 Fold our hands round her knees, and cling ?  
 O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,  
 Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring !  
 For the stars and the winds are unto her  
 As raiment, as songs of the harp-player ;  
 For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,  
 And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,  
And all the season of snows and sins ;  
The days dividing lover and lover,  
The light that loses, the night that wins ;  
And time remembered is grief forgotten,  
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,  
And in green underwood and cover  
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,  
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,  
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes  
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit ;  
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,  
And the oat is heard above the lyre,  
And the hoofèd heel of a satyr crushes  
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,  
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,  
Follows with dancing and fills with delight  
The Mænad and the Bassarid ;  
And soft as lips that laugh and hide  
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,  
And screen from seeing and leave in sight  
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair  
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes ;  
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare  
Her bright breast shortening into sighs ;  
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,  
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves  
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare  
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

## ALTHÆA

What do ye singing ? what is this ye sing ?

## CHORUS

Flowers bring we, and pure lips that please the gods,  
And raiment meet for service : lest the day  
Turn sharp with all its honey in our lips.

## ALTHÆA

Night, a black hound, follows the white fawn day,  
Swifter than dreams the white flown feet of sleep ;  
Will ye pray back the night with any prayers ?  
And though the spring put back a little while  
Winter, and snows that plague all men for sin,  
And the iron time of cursing, yet I know  
Spring shall be ruined with the rain, and storm  
Eat up like fire the ashen autumn days.  
I marvel what men do with prayers awake  
Who dream and die with dreaming ; any god,  
Yea the least god of all things called divine,  
Is more than sleep and waking ; yet we say,  
Perchance by praying a man shall match his god.  
For if sleep have no mercy, and man's dreams  
Bite to the blood and burn into the bone,  
What shall this man do waking ? By the gods,  
He shall not pray to dream sweet things to-night,  
Having dreamt once more bitter things than death.

## CHORUS

Queen, but what is it that hath burnt thine heart ?  
For thy speech flickers like a blown-out flame.

## ALTHÆA

Look, ye say well, and know not what ye say ;  
For all my sleep is turned into a fire,  
And all my dreams to stuff that kindles it.

## CHORUS

Yet one doth well being patient of the gods.

## ALTHÆA

Yea, lest they smite us with some four-foot plague.

## CHORUS

But when time spreads find out some herb for it.

## ALTHÆA

And with their healing herbs infect our blood.

## CHORUS

What ails thee to be jealous of their ways ?

## ALTHÆA

What if they give us poisonous drinks for wine ?

## CHORUS

They have their will ; much talking mends it not.

## ALTHÆA

And gall for milk, and cursing for a prayer ?

## CHORUS

Have they not given life, and the end of life ?

## ALTHÆA

Lo, where they heal, they help not ; thus they do,  
They mock us with a little piteousness,  
And we say prayers, and weep ; but at the last,  
Sparing awhile, they smite and spare no whit.

## CHORUS

Small praise man gets dispraising the high gods :  
What have they done that thou dishonourest them ?

## ALTHÆA

First Artemis for all this harried land  
I praise not, and for wasting of the boar  
That mars with tooth and tusk and fiery feet  
Green pasturage and the grace of standing corn  
And meadow and marsh with springs and unblown  
leaves,  
Flocks and swift herds and all that bite sweet grass,  
I praise her not ; what things are these to praise ?

## CHORUS

But when the king did sacrifice, and gave  
Each god fair dues of wheat and blood and wine,  
Her not with bloodshed nor burnt-offering  
Revered he, nor with salt or cloven cake ;  
Wherfore being wroth she plagued the land ; but  
now  
Takes off from us fate and her heavy things.  
Which deed of these twain were not good to praise ?  
For a just deed looks always either way  
With blameless eyes, and mercy is no fault.

## ALTHÆA

Yea, but a curse she hath sent above all these  
To hurt us where she healed us ; and hath lit  
Fire where the old fire went out, and where the wind  
Slackened, hath blown on us with deadlier air.

## CHORUS

What storm is this that tightens all our sail ?

## ALTHÆA

Love, a thwart sea-wind full of rain and foam.

## CHORUS

Whence blown, and born under what stormier star ?

## ALTHÆA

Southward across Euenus from the sea.

## CHORUS

Thy speech turns toward Arcadia like blown wind.

## ALTHÆA

Sharp as the north sets when the snows are out.

## CHORUS

Nay, for this maiden hath no touch of love.

## ALTHÆA

I would she had sought in some cold gulf of sea  
Love, or in dens where strange beasts lurk, or fire,  
Or snows on the extreme hills, or iron land  
Where no spring is ; I would she had sought therein  
And found, or ever love had found her here.

## CHORUS

She is holier than all holy days or things,  
The sprinkled water or fume of perfect fire ;  
Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled  
With higher thoughts than heaven ; a maiden clean,  
Pure iron, fashioned for a sword ; and man  
She loves not ; what should one such do with love ?

## ALTHÆA

Look you, I speak not as one light of wit,  
But as a queen speaks, being heart-vexed ; for oft  
I hear my brothers wrangling in mid hall,  
And am not moved ; and my son chiding them,  
And these things nowise move me, but I know  
Foolish and wise men must be to the end,  
And feed myself with patience ; but this most,  
This moves me, that for wise men as for fools  
Love is one thing, an evil thing, and turns  
Choice words and wisdom into fire and air.  
And in the end shall no joy come, but grief,  
Sharp words and soul's division and fresh tears  
Flower-wise upon the old root of tears brought forth,  
Fruit-wise upon the old flower of tears sprung up,  
Pitiful sighs, and much regrafted pain.  
These things are in my presage, and myself  
Am part of them and know not ; but in dreams  
The gods are heavy on me, and all the fates  
Shed fire across my eyelids mixed with night,  
And burn me blind, and disilluminate  
My sense of seeing, and my perspicuous soul  
Darken with vision ; seeing I see not, hear  
And hearing am not holpen, but mine eyes  
Stain many tender broideries in the bed

Drawn up about my face that I may weep  
And the king wake not ; and my brows and lips  
Tremble and sob in sleeping, like swift flames  
That tremble, or water when it sobs with heat  
Kindled from under ; and my tears fill my breast  
And speck the fair dyed pillows round the king  
With barren showers and salter than the sea,  
Such dreams divide me dreaming ; for long since  
I dreamed that out of this my womb had sprung  
Fire and a firebrand ; this was ere my son,  
Meleager, a goodly flower in fields of fight,  
Felt the light touch him coming forth, and wailed  
Childlike ; but yet he was not ; and in time  
I bare him, and my heart was great ; for yet  
So royally was never strong man born,  
Nor queen so nobly bore as noble a thing  
As this my son was : such a birth God sent  
And such a grace to bear it. Then came in  
Three weaving women, and span each a thread,  
Saying This for strength and That for luck, and one  
Saying Till the brand upon the hearth burn down,  
So long shall this man see good days and live.  
And I with gathered raiment from the bed  
Sprang, and drew forth the brand, and cast on it  
Water, and trod the flame bare-foot, and crushed  
With naked hand spark beaten out of spark  
And blew against and quenched it ; for I said,  
These are the most high Fates that dwell with us,  
And we find favour a little in their sight,  
A little, and more we miss of, and much time  
Foils us ; howbeit they have pitied me, O son,  
And thee most piteous, thee a tenderer thing  
Than any flower of fleshly seed alive.  
Wherefore I kissed and hid him with my hands,  
And covered under arms and hair, and wept,

And feared to touch him with my tears, and laughed ;  
So light a thing was this man, grown so great  
Men cast their heads back, seeing against the sun  
Blaze the armed man carven on his shield, and hear  
The laughter of little bells along the brace  
Ring, as birds singing or flutes blown, and watch,  
High up, the cloven shadow of either plume  
Divide the bright light of the brass, and make  
His helmet as a windy and wintering moon  
Seen through blown cloud and plume-like drift, when  
ships

Drive, and men strive with all the sea, and oars  
Break, and the beaks dip under, drinking death ;  
Yet was he then but a span long, and moaned  
With inarticulate mouth inseparate words,  
And with blind lips and fingers wrung my breast  
Hard, and thrust out with foolish hands and feet,  
Murmuring ; but those grey women with bound hair  
Who fright the gods frightened not him ; he laughed  
Seeing them, and pushed out hands to feel and haul  
Distaff and thread, intangible ; but they  
Passed, and I hid the brand, and in my heart  
Laughed likewise, having all my will of heaven.  
But now I know not if to left or right  
The gods have drawn us hither ; for again  
I dreamt, and saw the black brand burst on fire  
As a branch bursts in flower, and saw the flame  
Fade flower-wise, and Death came and with dry lips  
Blew the charred ash into my breast ; and Love  
Trampled the ember and crushed it with swift feet.  
This I have also at heart ; that not for me,  
Not for me only or son of mine, O girls,  
The gods have wrought life, and desire of life,  
Heart's love and heart's division ; but for all

There shines one sun and one wind blows till night.  
And when night comes the wind sinks and the sun,  
And there is no light after, and no storm,  
But sleep and much forgetfulness of things.  
In such wise I gat knowledge of the gods  
Years hence, and heard high sayings of one most wise,  
Eurythemis my mother, who beheld  
With eyes alive and spake with lips of these  
As one on earth disfleshed and disallied  
From breath or blood corruptible ; such gifts  
Time gave her, and an equal soul to these  
And equal face to all things ; thus she said.  
But whatsoever intolerable or glad  
The swift hours weave and unweave, I go hence  
Full of mine own soul, perfect of myself,  
Toward mine and me sufficient ; and what chance  
The gods cast lots for and shake out on us,  
That shall we take, and that much bear withal.  
And now, before these gather to the hunt,  
I will go arm my son and bring him forth,  
Lest love or some man's anger work him harm.

## CHORUS

Before the beginning of years  
There came to the making of man.  
Time, with a gift of tears ;  
Grief, with a glass that ran ;  
Pleasure, with pain for leaven ;  
Summer, with flowers that fell ;  
Remembrance fallen from heaven,  
And madness risen from hell ;  
Strength without hands to smite ;  
Love that endures for a breath :  
Night, the shadow of light,  
And life, the shadow of death.

And the high gods took in hand  
 Fire, and the falling of tears,  
 And a measure of sliding sand  
 From under the feet of the years ;  
 And froth and drift of the sea ;  
 And dust of the labouring earth ;  
 And bodies of things to be  
 In the houses of death and of birth ;  
 And wrought with weeping and laughter,  
 And fashioned with loathing and love  
 With life before and after  
 And death beneath and above,  
 For a day and a night and a morrow,  
 That his strength might endure for a span  
 With travail and heavy sorrow,  
 The holy spirit of man.

From the winds of the north and the south  
 They gathered as unto strife ;  
 They breathed upon his mouth,  
 They filled his body with life ;  
 Eyesight and speech they wrought  
 For the veils of the soul therein,  
 A time for labour and thought,  
 A time to serve and to sin ;  
 They gave him light in his ways,  
 And love, and a space for delight,  
 And beauty and length of days,  
 And night, and sleep in the night.  
 His speech is a burning fire ;  
 With his lips he travaileth ;  
 In his heart is a blind desire,  
 In his eyes foreknowledge of death ;

He weaves, and is clothed with derision ;  
 Sows, and he shall not reap ;  
 His life is a watch or a vision  
 Between a sleep and a sleep.

## MELEAGER

O sweet new heaven and air without a star,  
 Fair day, be fair and welcome, as to men  
 With deeds to do and praise to pluck from thee.  
 Come forth a child, born with clear sound and light,  
 With laughter and swift limbs and prosperous looks ;  
 That this great hunt with heroes for the hounds  
 May leave thee memorable and us well sped.

## ALTHÆA

Son, first I praise thy prayer, then bid thee speed ;  
 But the gods hear men's hands before their lips,  
 And heed beyond all crying and sacrifice  
 Light of things done and noise of labouring men.  
 But thou, being armed and perfect for the deed,  
 Abide ; for like rain-flakes in a wind they grow,  
 The men thy fellows, and the choice of the world,  
 Bound to root out the tuskèd plague, and leave  
 Thanks and safe days and peace in Calydon.

## MELEAGER

For the whole city and all the low-lying land  
 Flames, and the soft air sounds with them that come ;  
 The gods give all these fruit of all their works.

## ALTHÆA

Set thine eye thither and fix thy spirit and say  
 Whom there thou knowest ; for sharp mixed shadow  
 and wind

Blown up between the morning and the mist,  
 With steam of steeds and flash of bridle or wheel,  
 And fire, and parcels of the broken dawn,  
 And dust divided by hard light, and spears  
 That shine and shift as the edge of wild beasts' eyes,  
 Smite upon mine ; so fiery their blind edge  
 Burns, and bright points break up and baffle day.

## MELEAGER

The first, for many I know not, being far off,  
 Peleus the Larissæan, couched with whom  
 Sleeps the white sea-bred wife and silver-shod,  
 Fair as fled foam, a goddess ; and their son  
 Most swift and splendid of men's children born,  
 Most like a god, full of the future fame.

## ALTHÆA

Who are these shining like one sundered star ?

## MELEAGER

Thy sister's sons, a double flower of men.

## ALTHÆA

O sweetest kin to me in all the world,  
 O twin-born blood of Leda, gracious heads  
 Like kindled lights in untempestuous heaven,  
 Fair flower-like stars on the iron foam of fight,  
 With what glad heart and kindness of soul,  
 Even to the staining of both eyes with tears  
 And kindling of warm eyelids with desire,  
 A great way off I greet you, and rejoice  
 Seeing you so fair, and moulded like as gods.  
 Far off ye come, and least in years of these,  
 But lordliest, but worth love to look upon.

## MELEAGER

Even such (for sailing hither I saw far hence,  
 And where Eurotas hollows his moist rock  
 Nigh Sparta with a strenuous-hearted stream)  
 Even such I saw their sisters ; one swan-white,  
 The little Helen, and less fair than she  
 Fair Clytaemnestra, grave as pasturing fawns  
 Who feed and fear some arrow ; but at whiles,  
 As one smitten with love or wrung with joy,  
 She laughs and lightens with her eyes, and then  
 Weeps ; whereat Helen, having laughed, weeps too,  
 And the other chides her, and she being chid speaks  
 nought,  
 But cheeks and lips and eyelids kisses her,  
 Laughing ; so fare they, as in their bloomless bud  
 And full of unblown life, the blood of gods.

## ALTHAEA

Sweet days befall them and good loves and lords,  
 And tender and temperate honours of the hearth,  
 Peace, and a perfect life and blameless bed.  
 But who shows next an eagle wrought in gold,  
 That flames and beats broad wings against the sun  
 And with void mouth gapes after emptier prey ?

## MELEAGER

Know by that sign the reign of Telamon  
 Between the fierce mouths of the encountering brine  
 On the strait reefs of twice-washed Salamis.

## ALTHAEA

For like one great of hand he bears himself,  
 Vine-chapleted, with savours of the sea,

Glittering as wine and moving as a wave.  
But who girt round there roughly follows him ?

## MELEAGER

Ancæus, great of hand, an iron bulk,  
Two-edged for fight as the axe against his arm,  
Who drives against the surge of stormy spears  
Full-sailed ; him Cepheus follows, his twin-born,  
Chief name next his of all Arcadian men.

## ALTHÆA

Praise be with men abroad ; chaste lives with us,  
Home-keeping days and household reverences.

## MELEAGER

Next by the left unsandalled foot know thou  
The sail and oar of this Ætolian land,  
Thy brethren, Toxeus and the violent-souled  
Plexippus, over-swift with hand and tongue ;  
For hands are fruitful, but the ignorant mouth  
Blows and corrupts their work with barren breath.

## ALTHÆA

Speech too bears fruit, being worthy ; and air blows  
down  
Things poisonous, and high-seated violences,  
And with charmed words and songs have men put  
out  
Wild evil, and the fire of tyrannies.

## MELEAGER

Yea, all things have they, save the gods and love.

## ALTHÆA

Love thou the law and cleave to things ordained.

MELEAGER

Law lives upon their lips whom these applaud.

ALTHÆA

How sayest thou these? what god applauds new things?

MELEAGER

Zeus, who hath fear and custom under foot.

ALTHÆA

But loves not laws thrown down and lives awry.

MELEAGER

Yet is not less himself than his own law.

ALTHÆA

Nor shifts and shuffles old things up and down.

MELEAGER

But what he will remoulds and discreates.

ALTHÆA

Much, but not this, that each thing live its life.

MELEAGER

Nor only live, but lighten and lift up higher.

ALTHÆA

Pride breaks itself, and too much gained is gone.

MELEAGER

Things gained are gone, but great things done endure.

## ALTHÆA

Child, if a man serve law through all his life  
And with his whole heart worship, him all gods  
Praise ; but who loves it only with his lips,  
And not in heart and deed desiring it  
Hides a perverse will with obsequious words,  
Him heaven infatuates and his twin-born fate  
Tracks, and gains on him, scenting sins far off,  
And the swift hounds of violent death devour.  
Be man at one with equal-minded gods,  
So shall he prosper ; not through laws torn up,  
Violated rule and a new face of things.

A woman armed makes war upon herself,  
Unwomanlike, and treads down use and wont  
And the sweet common honour that she hath,  
Love, and the cry of children, and the hand  
Trothplight and mutual mouth of marriages.  
This doth she, being unloved ; whom if one love,  
Not fire nor iron and the wide-mouthed wars  
Are deadlier than her lips or braided hair.  
For of the one comes poison, and a curse  
Falls from the other and burns the lives of men.  
But thou, son, be not filled with evil dreams,  
Nor with desire of these things ; for with time  
Blind love burns out ; but if one feed it full  
Till some discolouring stain dyes all his life,  
He shall keep nothing praiseworthy, nor die  
The sweet wise death of old men honourable,  
Who have lived out all the length of all their years  
Blameless, and seen well-pleased the face of gods,  
And without shame and without fear have wrought  
Things memorable, and while their days held out  
In sight of all men and the sun's great light

Have gat them glory and given of their own praise  
To the earth that bare them and the day that bred,  
Home friends and far-off hospitalities,  
And filled with gracious and memorial fame  
Lands loved of summer or washed by violent seas,  
Towns populous and many unfooted ways,  
And alien lips and native with their own.  
But when white age and venerable death  
Mow down the strength and life within their limbs,  
Drain out the blood and darken their clear eyes,  
Immortal honour is on them, having past  
Through splendid life and death desirable  
To the clear seat and remote throne of souls,  
Lands indiscernable in the unheard-of west,  
Round which the strong stream of a sacred sea  
Rolls without wind for ever, and the snow  
There shows not her white wings and windy feet,  
Nor thunder nor swift rain saith anything,  
Nor the sun burns, but all things rest and thrive ;  
And these, filled full of days, divine and dead,  
Sages and singers fiery from the god,  
And such as loved their land and all things good  
And, best beloved of best men, liberty,  
Free lives and lips, free hands of men free-born,  
And whatsoever on earth was honourable  
And whosoever of all the ephemeral seed,  
Live there a life no liker to the gods  
But nearer than their life of terrene days.  
Love thou such life and look for such a death.  
But from the light and fiery dreams of love  
Spring heavy sorrows and a sleepless life,  
Visions not dreams, whose lids no charm shall close  
Nor song assuage them waking ; and swift death  
Crushes with sterile feet the unripening ear,

Treads out the timeless vintage ; whom do thou  
Eschewing embrace the luck of this thy life,  
Not without honour ; and it shall bear to thee  
Such fruit as men reap from spent hours and wear,  
Few men, but happy ; of whom be thou, O son,  
Happiest, if thou submit thy soul to fate,  
And set thine eyes and heart on hopes high-born  
And divine deeds and abstinence divine.  
So shalt thou be toward all men all thy days  
As light and might communicable, and burn  
From heaven among the stars above the hours,  
And break not as a man breaks nor burn down :  
For to whom other of all heroic names  
Have the gods given his life in hand as thine ?  
And gloriously hast thou lived, and made thy life  
To me that bare thee and to all men born  
Thankworthy, a praise for ever ; and hast won fame  
When wild wars broke all round thy father's house,  
And the mad people of windy mountain ways  
Laid spears against us like a sea, and all  
Ætolia thundered with Thessalian hoofs ;  
Yet these, as wind baffles the foam, and beats  
Straight back the relaxed ripple, didst thou break  
And loosen all their lances, till undone  
And man from man they fell ; for ye twain stood  
God against god, Ares and Artemis,  
And thou the mightier ; wherefore she unleashed  
A sharp-toothed curse thou too shalt overcome ;  
For in the greener blossom of thy life  
Ere the full blade caught flower, and when time  
gave  
Respite, thou didst not slacken soul nor sleep,  
But with great hand and heart seek praise of men  
Out of sharp straits and many a grievous thing,

Seeing the strange foam of undivided seas  
 On channels never sailed in, and by shores  
 Where the old winds cease not blowing, and all the  
 night

Thunders, and day is no delight to men.

#### CHORUS

Meleager, a noble wisdom and fair words  
 The gods have given this woman ; hear thou these.

#### MELEAGER

O mother, I am not fain to strive in speech  
 Nor set my mouth against thee, who art wise  
 Even as they say and full of sacred words.  
 But one thing I know surely, and cleave to this ;  
 That though I be not subtle of wit as thou  
 Nor womanlike to weave sweet words, and melt  
 Mutable minds of wise men as with fire,  
 I too, doing justly and reverencing the gods,  
 Shall not want wit to see what things be right.  
 For whom they love and whom reject, being gods,  
 There is no man but seeth, and in good time  
 Submits himself, refraining all his heart.  
 And I too as thou sayest have seen great things ;  
 Seen otherwhere, but chiefly when the sail  
 First caught between stretched ropes the roaring  
 west,  
 And all our oars smote eastward, and the wind  
 First flung round faces of seafaring men  
 White splendid snow-flakes of the sundering foam,  
 And the first furrow in virginal green sea  
 Followed the plunging ploughshare of hewn pine,  
 And closed, as when deep sleep subdues man's breath  
 Lips close and heart subsides ; and closing, shone

Sunlike with many a Nereid's hair, and moved  
Round many a trembling mouth of doubtful gods,  
Risen out of sunless and sonorous gulfs  
Through waning water and into shallow light,  
That watched us ; and when flying the dove was  
snared

As with men's hands, but we shot after and sped  
Clear through the irremeable Symplegades ;  
And chiefliest when hoar beach and herbless cliff  
Stood out ahead from Colchis, and we heard  
Clefts hoarse with wind, and saw through narrowing  
reefs

The lightning of the intolerable wave  
Flash, and the white wet flame of breakers burn  
Far under a kindling south-wind, as a lamp  
Burns and bends all its blowing flame one way ;  
Wild heights untravelled of the wind, and vales  
Cloven seaward by their violent streams, and white  
With bitter flowers and bright salt scurf of brine ;  
Heard sweep their sharp swift gales, and bowing  
birdwise

Shriek with birds' voices, and with furious feet  
Tread loose the long skirts of a storm ; and saw  
The whole white Euxine clash together and fall  
Full-mouthed, and thunderous from a thousand  
throats :

Yet we drew thither and won the fleece and won  
Medea, deadlier than the sea ; but there  
Seeing many a wonder and fearful things to men  
I saw not one thing like this one seen here,  
Most fair and fearful, feminine, a god,  
Faultless ; whom I that love not, being unlike,  
Fear, and give honour, and choose from all the  
gods.

## ŒNEUS

Lady, the daughter of Thestius, and thou, son,  
 Not ignorant of your strife nor light of wit,  
 Scared with vain dreams and fluttering like spent  
 fire,

I come to judge between you, but a king  
 Full of past days and wise from years endured.  
 Nor thee I praise, who art fain to undo things done :  
 Nor thee, who art swift to esteem them overmuch.  
 For what the hours have given is given, and this  
 Changeless ; howbeit these change, and in good  
 time

Devise new things and good, not one thing still.  
 Us have they sent now at our need for help  
 Among men armed a woman, foreign born,  
 Virgin, not like the natural flower of things  
 That grows and bears and brings forth fruit and  
 dies ;

Unlovable, no light for a husband's house,  
 Espoused ; a glory among unwedded girls,  
 And chosen of gods who reverence maidenhood.  
 These too we honour in honouring her ; but thou,  
 Abstain thy feet from following, and thine eyes  
 From amorous touch ; nor set toward hers thine  
 heart,

Son, lest hate bear no deadlier fruit than love.

## ALTHÆA

O king, thou art wise, but wisdom halts ; and just,  
 But the gods love not justice more than fate,  
 And smite the righteous and the violent mouth,  
 And mix with insolent blood the reverent man's,  
 And bruise the holier as the lying lips.

Enough ; for wise words fail me, and my heart  
Takes fire and trembles flamewise, O my son,  
O child, for thine head's sake ; mine eyes wax thick,  
Turning toward thee, so goodly a weaponed man,  
So glorious ; and for love of thine own eyes  
They are darkened, and tears burn them, fierce as  
fire,

And my lips pause and my soul sinks with love.  
But by thine hand, by thy sweet life and eyes,  
By thy great heart and these clasped knees, O son,  
I pray thee that thou slay me not with thee.

For there was never a mother woman-born  
Loved her sons better ; and never a queen of men  
More perfect in her heart toward whom she loved.  
For what lies light on many and they forget,  
Small things and transitory as a wind o' the sea,  
I forget never ; I have seen thee all thine years  
A man in arms, strong and a joy to men  
Seeing thine head glitter and thine hand burn its way  
Through a heavy and iron furrow of sundering  
spears ;

But always also a flower of three suns old,  
The small one thing that lying drew down my life  
To lie with thee and feed thee ; a child and weak,  
Mine, a delight to no man, sweet to me.

Who then sought to thee ? who gat help ? who knew  
If thou wert goodly ? nay, no man at all.  
Or what sea saw thee, or sounded with thine oar,  
Child ? or what strange land shone with war through  
thee ?

But fair for me thou wert, O little life,  
Fruitless, the fruit of mine own flesh, and blind,  
More than much gold, ungrown, a foolish flower.  
For silver nor bright snow nor feather of foam

Was whiter, and no gold yellower than thine hair,  
 O child, my child ; and now thou art lordlier grown,  
 Not lovelier, nor a new thing in mine eyes,  
 I charge thee by thy soul and this my breast,  
 Fear thou the gods and me and thine own heart,  
 Lest all these turn against thee ; for who knows  
 What wind upon what wave of altering time  
 Shall speak a storm and blow calamity ?  
 And there is nothing stabile in the world  
 But the gods break it ; yet not less, fair son,  
 If but one thing be stronger, if one endure,  
 Surely the bitter and the rooted love  
 That burns between us, going from me to thee,  
 Shall more endure than all things. What dost thou,  
 Following strange loves ? why wilt thou kill mine  
 heart ?

Lo, I talk wild and windy words, and fall  
 From my clear wits, and seem of mine own self  
 Dethroned, dispraised, disseated ; and my mind,  
 That was my crown, breaks, and mine heart is gone,  
 And I am naked of my soul, and stand  
 Ashamed, as a mean woman ; take thou thought :  
 Live if thou wilt, and if thou wilt not, look,  
 The gods have given thee life to lose or keep,  
 Thou shalt not die as men die, but thine end  
 Fallen upon thee shall break me unaware.

#### MELEAGER

Queen, my whole heart is molten with thy tears,  
 And my limbs yearn with pity of thee, and love  
 Compels with grief mine eyes and labouring breath ;  
 For what thou art I know thee, and this thy breast  
 And thy fair eyes I worship, and am bound  
 Toward thee in spirit and love thee in all my soul.

For there is nothing terribler to men  
 Than the sweet face of mothers, and the might.  
 But what shall be let be ; for us the day  
 Once only lives a little, and is not found.  
 Time and the fruitful hour are more than we,  
 And these lay hold upon us ; but thou, God,  
 Zeus, the sole steersman of the helm of things,  
 Father, be swift to see us, and as thou wilt  
 Help : or if adverse, as thou wilt, refrain.

## CHORUS

We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair ; thou art  
 goodly, O Love ;  
 Thy wings make light in the air as the wings of a  
 dove.  
 Thy feet are as winds that divide the stream of the  
 sea ;  
 Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of  
 thee.  
 Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of  
 fire ;  
 Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of  
 desire ;  
 And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid ;  
 Her eyes are the eyes of a bride whom delight makes  
 afraid ;  
 As the breath in the buds that stir is her bridal  
 breath :  
 But Fate is the name of her ; and his name is Death.

For an evil blossom was born  
 Of sea-foam and the frothing of blood,  
 Blood-red and bitter of fruit,  
 And the seed of it laughter and tears,

And the leaves of it madness and scorn ;  
A bitter flower from the bud,  
Sprung of the sea without root,  
Sprung without graft from the years.

The weft of the world was untorn  
That is woven of the day on the night,  
The hair of the hours was not white  
Nor the raiment of time overworn,  
When a wonder, a world's delight,  
A perilous goddess was born ;  
And the waves of the sea as she came  
Clove, and the foam at her feet,  
Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth  
A fleshly blossom, a flame  
Filling the heavens with heat  
To the cold white ends of the north.

And in air the clamorous birds,  
And men upon earth that hear  
Sweet articulate words  
Sweetly divided apart,  
And in shallow and channel and mere  
The rapid and footless herds,  
Rejoiced, being foolish of heart.

For all they said upon earth,  
She is fair, she is white like a dove,  
And the life of the world in her breath  
Breathes, and is born at her birth ;  
For they knew thee for mother of love,  
And knew thee not mother of death.

What hadst thou to do being born,  
Mother, when winds were at ease,  
As a flower of the springtime of corn,  
A flower of the foam of the seas ?  
For bitter thou wast from thy birth,  
Aphrodite, a mother of strife ;  
For before thee some rest was on earth,  
A little respite from tears,  
A little pleasure of life ;  
For life was not then as thou art,  
But as one that waxeth in years  
Sweet-spoken, a fruitful wife ;  
Earth had no thorn, and desire  
No sting, neither death any dart ;  
What hadst thou to do amongst these,  
Thou, clothed with a burning fire,  
Thou, girt with sorrow of heart,  
Thou, sprung of the seed of the seas  
As an ear from a seed of corn,  
As a brand plucked forth of a pyre,  
As a ray shed forth of the morn,  
For division of soul and disease,  
For a dart and a sting and a thorn ?  
What ailed thee then to be born ?

Was there not evil enough,  
Mother, and anguish on earth  
Born with a man at his birth,  
Wastes underfoot, and above  
Storm out of heaven, and dearth  
Shaken down from the shining thereof,  
Wrecks from afar overseas  
And peril of shallow and firth,

And tears that spring and increase  
In the barren places of mirth,  
That thou, having wings as a dove,  
Being girt with desire for a girth,  
That thou must come after these,  
That thou must lay on him love ?

Thou shouldst not so have been born :  
But death should have risen with thee,  
Mother, and visible fear,  
Grief, and the wringing of hands,  
And noise of many that mourn ;  
The smitten bosom, the knee  
Bowed, and in each man's ear  
A cry as of perishing lands,  
A moan as of people in prison,  
A tumult of infinite griefs ;  
And thunder of storm on the sands,  
And wailing of wives on the shore ;  
And under thee newly arisen  
Loud shoals and shipwrecking reefs,  
Fierce air and violent light ;  
Sail rent and sundering oar,  
Darkness, and noises of night ;  
Clashing of streams in the sea,  
Wave against wave as a sword,  
Clamour of currents, and foam ;  
Rains making ruin on earth,  
Winds that wax ravenous and roam  
As wolves in a wolfish horde ;  
Fruits growing faint in the tree,  
And blind things dead in their birth ;  
Famine, and blighting of corn,  
When thy time was come to be born.

All these we know of ; but thee  
Who shall discern or declare ?  
In the uttermost ends of the sea  
The light of thine eyelids and hair,  
The light of thy bosom as fire  
Between the wheel of the sun  
And the flying flames of the air ?  
Wilt thou turn thee not yet nor have pity,  
But abide with despair and desire  
And the crying of armies undone,  
Lamentation of one with another  
And breaking of city by city ;  
The dividing of friend against friend,  
The severing of brother and brother ;  
Wilt thou utterly bring to an end ?  
Have mercy, mother !

For against all men from of old  
Thou hast set thine hand as a curse,  
And cast out gods from their places.  
These things are spoken of thee.  
Strong kings and goodly with gold  
Thou hast found out arrows to pierce,  
And made their kingdoms and races  
As dust and surf of the sea.  
All these, overburdened with woes  
And with length of their days waxen weak,  
Thou slewest ; and sentest moreover  
Upon Tyro an evil thing,  
Rent hair and a fetter and blows  
Making bloody the flower of the cheek,  
Though she lay by a god as a lover,  
Though fair, and the seed of a king.

For of old, being full of thy fire,  
She endured not longer to wear  
On her bosom a saffron vest,  
On her shoulder an ashwood quiver ;  
Being mixed and made one through desire  
With Enipeus, and all her hair  
Made moist with his mouth, and her breast  
Filled full of the foam of the river.

## ATALANTA

Sun, and clear light among green hills, and day  
Late risen and long sought after, and you just gods  
Whose hands divide anguish and recompense,  
But first the sun's white sister, a maid in heaven,  
On earth of all maids worshipped—hail, and hear,  
And witness with me if not without sign sent,  
Not without rule and reverence, I a maid  
Hallowed, and huntress holy as whom I serve,  
Here in your sight and eyeshot of these men  
Stand, girt as they toward hunting, and my shafts  
Drawn ; wherefore all ye stand up on my side,  
If I be pure and all ye righteous gods,  
Lest one revile me, a woman, yet no wife,  
That bear a spear for spindle, and this bow strung  
For a web woven ; and with pure lips salute  
Heaven, and the face of all the gods, and dawn  
Filling with maiden flames and maiden flowers  
The starless fold o' the stars, and making sweet  
The warm wan heights of the air, moon-trodden ways  
And breathless gates and extreme hills of heaven.  
Whom, having offered water and bloodless gifts,  
Flowers, and a golden circlet of pure hair,  
Next Artemis I bid be favourable  
And make this day all golden, hers and ours,

Gracious and good and white to the unblamed end.  
But thou, O well-beloved, of all my days  
Bid it be fruitful, and a crown for all,  
To bring forth leaves and bind round all my hair  
With perfect chaplets woven for thine of thee.  
For not without the word of thy chaste mouth,  
For not without law given and clean command,  
Across the white straits of the running sea  
From Elis even to the Acheloian horn,  
I with clear winds came hither and gentle gods,  
Far off my father's house, and left uncheered  
Iasius, and uncheered the Arcadian hills  
And all their green-haired waters, and all woods  
Disconsolate, to hear no horn of mine  
Blown, and behold no flash of swift white feet.

#### MELEAGER

For thy name's sake and awe toward thy chaste head,  
O holiest Atalanta, no man dares  
Praise thee, though fairer than whom all men praise,  
And godlike for thy grace of hallowed hair  
And holy habit of thine eyes, and feet  
That make the blown foam neither swift nor white  
Though the wind winnow and whirl it ; yet we praise  
Gods, found because of thee adorable  
And for thy sake praiseworthiest from all men :  
Thee therefore we praise also, thee as these,  
Pure, and a light lit at the hands of gods.

#### TOXEUS

How long will ye whet spears with eloquence,  
Fight, and kill beasts dry-handed with sweet words ?  
Cease, or talk still and slay thy boars at home.

## PLEXIPPUS

Why, if she ride among us for a man,  
Sit thou for her and spin ; a man grown girl  
Is worth a woman weaponed ; sit thou here.

## MELEAGER

Peace, and be wise ; no gods love idle speech.

## PLEXIPPUS

Nor any man a man's mouth woman-tongued.

## MELEAGER

For my lips bite not sharper than mine hands.

## PLEXIPPUS

Nay, both bite soft, but no whit softly mine.

## MELEAGER

Keep thine hands clean ; they have time enough to  
stain.

## PLEXIPPUS

For thine shall rest and wax not red to-day.

## MELEAGER

Have all thy will of words ; talk out thine heart.

## ALTHÆA

Refrain your lips, O brethren, and my son,  
Lest words turn snakes and bite you uttering them.

## TOXEUS

Except she give her blood before the gods,  
What profit shall a maid be among men ?

## PLEXIPPUS

Let her come crowned and stretch her throat for a  
knife,  
Bleat out her spirit and die, and so shall men  
Through her too prosper and through prosperous  
gods,  
But nowise through her living ; shall she live  
A flower-bud of the flower-bed, or sweet fruit  
For kisses and the honey-making mouth,  
And play the shield for strong men and the spear ?  
Then shall the heifer and her mate lock horns,  
And the bride overbear the groom, and men  
Gods ; for no less division sunders these ;  
Since all things made are seasonable in time,  
But if one alter unseasonable are all.  
But thou, O Zeus, hear me that I may slay  
This beast before thee and no man halve with me  
Nor woman, lest these mock thee, though a god,  
Who hast made men strong, and thou being wise be  
held  
Foolish ; for wise is that thing which endures.

## ATALANTA

Men, and the chosen of all this people, and thou,  
King, I beseech you a little bear with me.  
For if my life be shameful that I live,  
Let the gods witness and their wrath ; but these  
Cast no such word against me. Thou, O mine,  
O holy, O happy goddess, if I sin  
Changing the words of women and the works  
For spears and strange men's faces, hast not thou  
One shaft of all thy sudden seven that pierced  
Seven through the bosom or shining throat or side,

All couched about one mother's loosening knees,  
All holy born, engraffed of Tantalus ?  
But if toward any of you I am overbold  
That take thus much upon me, let him think  
How I, for all my forest holiness,  
Fame, and this armed and iron maidenhood,  
Pay thus much also ; I shall have no man's love  
For ever, and no face of children born  
Or feeding lips upon me or fastening eyes  
For ever, nor being dead shall kings my sons  
Mourn me and bury, and tears on daughters' cheeks  
Burn ; but a cold and sacred life, but strange,  
But far from dances and the back-blown torch,  
Far off from flowers or any bed of man,  
Shall my life be for ever : me the snows  
That face the first o' the morning, and cold hills  
Full of the land-wind and sea-travelling storms  
And many a wandering wing of noisy nights  
That know the thunder and hear the thickening  
wolves—

Me the utmost pine and footless frost of woods  
That talk with many winds and gods, the hours  
Re-risen, and white divisions of the dawn,  
Springs thousand-tongued with the intermitting reed  
And streams that murmur of the mother snow—  
Me these allure, and know me ; but no man  
Knows, and my goddess only. Lo now, see  
If one of all you these things vex at all.  
Would God that any of you had all the praise  
And I no manner of memory when I die,  
So might I show before her perfect eyes  
Pure, whom I follow, a maiden to my death.  
But for the rest let all have all they will ;  
For is it a grief to you that I have part,

Being woman merely, in your male might and deeds  
Done by main strength ? yet in my body is throned  
As great a heart, and in my spirit, O men,  
I have not less of godlike. Evil it were  
That one a coward should mix with you, one hand  
Fearful, one eye abase itself ; and these  
Well might ye hate and well revile, not me.  
For not the difference of the several flesh  
Being vile or noble or beautiful or base  
Makes praiseworthy, but purer spirit and heart  
Higher than these meaner mouths and limbs, that  
feed,

Rise, rest, and are and are not ; and for me,  
What should I say ? but by the gods of the world  
And this my maiden body, by all oaths  
That bind the tongue of men and the evil will,  
I am not mighty-minded, nor desire  
Crowns, nor the spoil of slain things nor the fame ;  
Feed ye on these, eat and wax fat ; cry out,  
Laugh, having eaten, and leap without a lyre,  
Sing, mix the wind with clamour, smite and shake  
Sonorous timbrels and tumultuous hair,  
And fill the dance up with tempestuous feet,  
For I will none ; but having prayed my prayers  
And made thank-offering for prosperities,  
I shall go hence and no man see me more.  
What thing is this for you to shout me down,  
What, for a man to grudge me this my life  
As it were envious of all yours, and I  
A thief of reputations ? nay, for now,  
If there be any highest in heaven, a god  
Above all thrones and thunders of the gods  
Throned, and the wheel of the world roll under him,  
Judge he between me and all of you, and see

If I transgress at all : but ye, refrain  
 Transgressing hands and reinless mouths, and keep  
 Silence, lest by much foam of violent words  
 And proper poison of your lips ye die.

## ŒNEUS

O flower of Tegea, maiden, fleetest foot  
 And holiest head of women, have good cheer  
 Of thy good words : but ye, depart with her  
 In peace and reverence, each with blameless eye  
 Following his fate ; exalt your hands and hearts,  
 Strike, cease not, arrow on arrow and wound on  
 wound,  
 And go with gods and with the gods return.

## CHORUS

Who hath given man speech ? or who hath set  
 therein  
 A thorn for peril and a snare for sin ?  
 For in the word his life is and his breath,  
 And in the word his death,  
 That madness and the infatuate heart may breed  
 From the word's womb the deed  
 And life bring one thing forth ere all pass by,  
 Even one thing which is ours yet cannot die—  
 Death. Hast thou seen him ever anywhere,  
 Time's twin-born brother, imperishable as he  
 Is perishable and plaintive, clothed with care  
 And mutable as sand,  
 But death is strong and full of blood and fair  
 And perdurable and like a lord of land ?  
 Nay, time thou seest not, death thou wilt not see  
 Till life's right hand be loosened from thine hand  
 And thy life-days from thee.

For the gods very subtly fashion  
Madness with sadness upon earth :  
Not knowing in any wise compassion,  
Nor holding pity of any worth ;  
And many things they have given and taken,  
And wrought and ruined many things ;  
The firm land have they loosed and shaken,  
And sealed the sea with all her springs ;  
They have wearied time with heavy burdens  
And vexed the lips of life with breath :  
Set men to labour and given them guerdons,  
Death, and great darkness after death :  
Put moans into the bridal measure  
And on the bridal wools a stain ;  
And circled pain about with pleasure,  
And girdled pleasure about with pain ;  
And strewed one marriage-bed with tears and fire  
For extreme loathing and supreme desire.

What shall be done with all these tears of ours ?  
Shall they make watersprings in the fair heaven  
To bathe the brows of morning ? or like flowers  
Be shed and shine before the starriest hours,  
Or made the raiment of the weeping Seven ?  
Or rather, O our masters, shall they be  
Food for the famine of the grievous sea,  
A great well-head of lamentation  
Satiating the sad gods ? or fall and flow  
Among the years and seasons to and fro,  
And wash their feet with tribulation  
And fill them full with grieving ere they go ?  
Alas, our lords, and yet alas again,  
Seeing all your iron heaven is gilt as gold  
But all we smite thereat in vain ;

Smite the gates barred with groanings manifold,  
But all the floors are paven with our pain.  
Yea, and with weariness of lips and eyes,  
With breaking of the bosom, and with sighs,  
We labour, and are clad and fed with grief  
And filled with days we would not fain behold  
And nights we would not hear of ; we wax old,  
All we wax old and wither like a leaf.  
We are outcast, strayed between bright sun and  
moon ;  
Our light and darkness are as leaves of flowers,  
Black flowers and white, that perish ; and the noon  
As midnight, and the night as daylight hours.  
A little fruit a little while is ours,  
And the worm finds it soon.

But up in heaven the high gods one by one  
Lay hands upon the draught that quickeneth,  
Fulfilled with all tears shed and all things done,  
And stir with soft imperishable breath  
The bubbling bitterness of life and death,  
And hold it to our lips and laugh ; but they  
Preserve their lips from tasting night or day,  
Lest they too change and sleep, the fates that spun,  
The lips that made us and the hands that slay ;  
Lest all these change, and heaven bow down to  
none,  
Change and be subject to the secular sway  
And terrene revolution of the sun.  
Therefore they thrust it from them, putting time away.

I would the wine of time, made sharp and sweet  
With multitudinous days and nights and tears  
And many mixing savours of strange years,

Were no more trodden of them under feet,  
Cast out and spilt about their holy places :  
That life were given them as a fruit to eat  
And death to drink as water ; that the light  
Might ebb, drawn backward from their eyes, and night  
    Hide for one hour the imperishable faces.  
That they might rise up sad in heaven, and know  
Sorrow and sleep, one paler than young snow,  
    One cold as blight of dew and ruinous rain ;  
Rise up and rest and suffer a little, and be  
Awhile as all things born with us and we,  
    And grieve as men, and like slain men be slain.

For now we know not of them ; but one saith  
    The gods are gracious, praising God ; and one,  
When hast thou seen ? or hast thou felt his breath  
    Touch, nor consume thine eyelids as the sun,  
Nor fill thee to the lips with fiery death ?  
    None hath beheld him, none  
Seen above other gods and shapes of things,  
Swift without feet and flying without wings,  
Intolerable, not clad with death or life,  
    Insatiable, not known of night or day,  
The lord of love and loathing and of strife  
    Who gives a star and takes a sun away ;  
Who shapes the soul, and makes her a barren wife  
    To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay ;  
Who turns the large limbs to a little flame  
    And binds the great sea with a little sand ;  
Who makes desire, and slays desire with shame ;  
    Who shakes the heaven as ashes in his hand ;  
Who, seeing the light and shadow for the same,  
    Bids day waste night as fire devours a brand,  
Smites without sword, and scourges without rod ;  
    The supreme evil, God.

Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us,  
One saith, and hidden our eyes away from sight,  
And made us transitory and hazardous,  
Light things and slight ;  
Yet have men praised thee, saying, He hath made  
man thus,  
And he doeth right.  
Thou hast kissed us, and hast smitten ; thou hast  
laid  
Upon us with thy left hand life, and said,  
Live : and again thou hast said, Yield up your  
breath,  
And with thy right hand laid upon us death.  
Thou hast sent us sleep, and stricken sleep with  
dreams,  
Saying, Joy is not, but love of joy shall be ;  
Thou hast made sweet springs for all the pleasant  
streams,  
In the end thou hast made them bitter with the  
sea.  
Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men ;  
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears ;  
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again ;  
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes and  
ears.  
Therefore because thou art strong, our father, and  
we  
Feeble ; and thou art against us, and thine hand  
Constrains us in the shallows of the sea  
And breaks us at the limits of the land ;  
Because thou hast bent thy lightnings as a bow,  
And loosed the hours like arrows ; and let fall  
Sins and wild words and many a wingèd woe  
And wars among us, and one end of all ;

Because thou hast made the thunder, and thy feet  
 Are as a rushing water when the skies  
 Break, but thy face as an exceeding heat  
 And flames of fire the eyelids of thine eyes ;  
 Because thou art over all who are over us ;  
 Because thy name is life and our name death ;  
 Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,  
 And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth ;  
 Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,  
 Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,  
 At least we witness of thee ere we die  
 That these things are not otherwise, but thus ;  
 That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,  
 That all men even as I,  
 All we are against thee, against thee, O God most  
 high.

But ye, keep ye on earth  
 Your lips from over-speech,  
 Loud words and longing are so little worth ;  
 And the end is hard to reach.  
 For silence after grievous things is good,  
 And reverence, and the fear that makes men whole,  
 And shame, and righteous governance of blood,  
 And lordship of the soul.  
 But from sharp words and wits men pluck no fruit,  
 And gathering thorns they shake the tree at root ;  
 For words divide and rend ;  
 But silence is most noble till the end.

## ALTHÆA

I heard within the house a cry of news  
 And came forth eastward hither, where the dawn  
 Cheers first these warder gods that face the sun

And next our eyes unrisen ; for unaware  
 Came clashes of swift hoofs and trampling feet  
 And through the windy pillared corridor  
 Light sharper than the frequent flames of day  
 That daily fill it from the fiery dawn ;  
 Gleams, and a thunder of people that cried out,  
 And dust and hurrying horsemen ; lo their chief,  
 That rode with Æneus rein by rein, returned.  
 What cheer, O herald of my lord the king ?

HERALD

Lady, good cheer and great ; the boar is slain.

CHORUS

Praised be all gods that look toward Calydon.

ALTHÆA

Good news and brief ; but by whose happier hand ?

HERALD

A maiden's and a prophet's and thy son's.

ALTHÆA

Well fare the spear that severed him and life.

HERALD

Thine own, and not an alien, hast thou blest.

ALTHÆA

Twice be thou too for my sake blest and his.

HERALD

At the king's word I rode afoam for thine.

ALTHÆA

Thou sayest he tarrieth till they bring the spoil ?

## HERALD

Hard by the quarry, where they breathe, O queen.

## ALTHÆA

Speak thou their chance ; but some bring flowers and  
crown

These gods and all the lintel, and shed wine,  
Fetch sacrifice and slay ; for heaven is good.

## HERALD

Some furlongs northward where the brakes begin  
West of that narrowing range of warrior hills  
Whose brooks have bled with battle when thy son  
Smote Acarnania, there all they made halt,  
And with keen eye took note of spear and hound,  
Royally ranked ; Laertes island-born,  
The young Gerenian Nestor, Panopeus,  
And Cepheus and Ancæus, mightiest thewed,  
Arcadians ; next, and evil-eyed of these,  
Arcadian Atalanta, with twain hounds  
Lengthening the leash, and under nose and brow  
Glittering with lipless tooth and fire-swift eye ;  
But from her white braced shoulder the plumed shafts  
Rang, and the bow shone from her side ; next her  
Meleager, like a sun in spring that strikes  
Branch into leaf and bloom into the world,  
A glory among men meaner ; Iphicles,  
And following him that slew the biform bull  
Pirithous, and divine Eurytion,  
And, bride-bound to the gods, Æacides.  
Then Telamon his brother, and Argive-born  
The seer and sayer of visions and of truth,  
Amphiaraus ; and a four-fold strength,

Thine, even thy mother's and thy sister's sons.  
And recent from the roar of foreign foam  
Jason, and Dryas twin-begot with war,  
A blossom of bright battle, sword and man  
Shining ; and Idas, and the keenest eye  
Of Lynceus, and Admetus twice-espoused,  
And Hippasus and Hyleus, great in heart.  
These having halted bade blow horns, and rode  
Through woods and waste lands cleft by stormy  
streams,  
Past yew-trees and the heavy hair of pines,  
And where the dew is thickest under oaks,  
This way and that ; but questing up and down  
They saw no trail nor scented ; and one said,  
Plexippus, Help, or help not, Artemis,  
And we will flay thy boarskin with male hands ;  
But saying, he ceased and said not that he would,  
Seeing where the green ooze of a sun-struck marsh  
Shook with a thousand reeds untunable,  
And in their moist and multitudinous flower  
Slept no soft sleep, with violent visions fed,  
The blind bulk of the immeasurable beast.  
And seeing, he shuddered with sharp lust of praise  
Through all his limbs, and launched a double dart.  
And missed ; for much desire divided him,  
Too hot of spirit and feebler than his will,  
That his hand failed, though fervent ; and the shaft,  
Sundering the rushes, in a tamarisk stem  
Shook, and stuck fast ; then all abode save one,  
The Arcadian Atalanta ; from her side  
Sprang her hounds, labouring at the leash, and  
slipped,  
And plashed ear-deep with plunging feet ; but she  
Saying, Speed it as I send it for thy sake,

Goddess, drew bow and loosed ; the sudden string  
Rang, and sprang inward, and the waterish air  
Hissed, and the moist plumes of the songless reeds  
Moved as a wave which the wind moves no more.  
But the boar heaved half out of ooze and slime  
His tense flank trembling round the barbèd wound,  
Hateful ; and fiery with invasive eyes  
And bristling with intolerable hair  
Plunged, and the hounds clung, and green flowers  
    and white  
Reddened and broke all round them where they  
came.  
And charging with sheer tusk he drove, and smote  
Hyleus ; and sharp death caught his sudden soul,  
And violent sleep shed night upon his eyes.  
Then Peleus, with strong strain of hand and heart,  
Shot ; but the sidelong arrow slid, and slew  
His comrade born and loving countryman,  
Under the left arm smitten, as he no less  
Poised a like arrow ; and bright blood brake afoam,  
And falling, and weighed back by clamorous arms,  
Sharp rang the dead limbs of Eurytion.  
Then one shot happier, the Cadmean seer,  
Amphiaraus ; for his sacred shaft  
Pierced the red circlet of one ravening eye  
Beneath the brute brows of the sanguine boar,  
Now bloodier from one slain ; but he so galled  
Sprang straight, and rearing cried no lesser cry  
Than thunder and the roar of wintering streams  
That mix their own foam with the yellower sea ;  
And as a tower that falls by fire in fight  
With ruin of walls and all its archery,  
And breaks the iron flower of war beneath,  
Crushing charred limbs and molten arms of men ;

So through crushed branches and the reddening  
brake

Clamoured and crashed the fervour of his feet,  
And trampled, springing sideways from the tusk,  
Too tardy a moving mould of heavy strength,  
Ancæus ; and as flakes of weak-winged snow  
Break, all the hard thews of his heaving limbs  
Broke, and rent flesh fell every way, and blood  
Flew, and fierce fragments of no more a man.  
Then all the heroes drew sharp breath, and gazed,  
And smote not ; but Meleager, but thy son,  
Right in the wild way of the coming curse  
Rock-rooted, fair with fierce and fastened lips,  
Clear eyes, and springing muscle and shortening  
limb—

With chin aslant indrawn to a tightening throat,  
Grave, and with gathered sinews, like a god,—  
Aimed on the left side his well-handled spear  
Grasped where the ash was knottiest hewn, and  
smote,

And with no missile wound, the monstrous boar  
Right in the hairiest hollow of his hide  
Under the last rib, sheer through bulk and bone,  
Deep in ; and deeply smitten, and to death,  
The heavy horror with his hanging shafts  
Leapt, and fell furiously, and from raging lips  
Foamed out the latest wrath of all his life.

And all they praised the gods with mightier heart,  
Zeus and all gods, but chiefliest Artemis,  
Seeing ; but Meleager bade whet knives and flay,  
Strip and stretch out the splendour of the spoil ;  
And hot and horrid from the work all these  
Sat, and drew breath and drank and made great  
cheer

And washed the hard sweat off their calmer brows.  
For much sweet grass grew higher than grew the  
reed,  
And good for slumber, and every holier herb,  
Narcissus, and the low-lying melilot,  
And all of goodliest blade and bloom that springs  
Where, hid by heavier hyacinth, violet buds  
Blossom and burn ; and fire of yellower flowers  
And light of crescent lilies, and such leaves  
As fear the Faun's and know the Dryad's foot ;  
Olive and ivy and poplar dedicate,  
And many a well-spring overwatched of these.  
There now they rest ; but me the king bade bear  
Good tidings to rejoice this town and thee.  
Wherfore be glad, and all ye give much thanks,  
For fallen is all the trouble of Calydon.

## ALTHÆA

Laud ye the gods ; for this they have given is  
good,  
And what shall be they hide until their time.  
Much good and somewhat grievous hast thou said,  
And either well ; but let all sad things be,  
Till all have made before the prosperous gods  
Burnt-offering, and poured out the floral wine.  
Look fair, O gods, and favourable ; for we  
Praise you with no false heart or flattering mouth,  
Being merciful, but with pure souls and prayer.

## HERALD

Thou hast prayed well ; for whoso fears not these,  
But once being prosperous waxes huge of heart,  
Him shall some new thing unaware destroy.

## CHORUS

O that I now, I too were  
By deep wells and water-floods,  
Streams of ancient hills, and where  
All the wan green places bear  
Blossoms cleaving to the sod,  
Fruitless fruit, and grasses fair,  
Or such darkest ivy-buds  
As divide thy yellow hair,  
Bacchus, and their leaves that nod  
Round thy fawnskin brush the bare  
Snow-soft shoulders of a god ;  
There the year is sweet, and there  
Earth is full of secret springs,  
And the fervent rose-cheeked hours,  
Those that marry dawn and noon,  
There are sunless, there look pale  
In dim leaves and hidden air,  
Pale as grass or latter flowers  
Or the wild vine's wan wet rings  
Full of dew beneath the moon,  
And all day the nightingale  
Sleeps, and all night sings ;  
There in cold remote recesses  
That nor alien eyes assail,  
Feet, nor imminence of wings,  
Nor a wind nor any tune,  
Thou, O queen and holiest,  
Flower the whitest of all things,  
With reluctant lengthening tresses  
And with sudden splendid breast  
Save of maidens un beholden,  
There art wont to enter, there

Thy divine swift limbs and golden  
Maiden growth of unbound hair,  
Bathed in waters white,  
Shine, and many a maid's by thee  
In moist woodland or the hilly  
Flowerless brakes where wells abound  
Out of all men's sight ;  
Or in lower pools that see  
All their marges clothed all round  
With the innumerable lily,  
Whence the golden-girdled bee  
Flits through flowering rush to fret  
White or duskier violet,  
Fair as those that in far years  
With their buds left luminous  
And their little leaves made wet,  
From the warmer dew of tears,  
Mother's tears in extreme need,  
Hid the limbs of Iamus,  
Of thy brother's seed ;  
For his heart was piteous  
Toward him, even as thine heart now  
Pitiful toward us ;  
Thine, O goddess, turning hither  
A benignant blameless brow ;  
Seeing enough of evil done  
And lives withered as leaves wither  
In the blasting of the sun ;  
Seeing enough of hunters dead,  
Ruin enough of all our year,  
Herds and harvests slain and shed,  
Herdsmen stricken many an one,  
Fruits and flocks consumed together,  
And great length of deadly days.

Yet with reverent lips and fear  
Turn we toward thee, turn and praise  
For this lightening of clear weather  
And prosperities begun.  
For not seldom, when all air  
As bright water without breath  
Shines, and when men fear not, fate  
Without thunder unaware  
Breaks, and brings down death.  
Joy with grief ye great gods give,  
Good with bad, and overbear  
All the pride of us that live,  
All the high estate,  
As ye long since overbore,  
As in old time long before,  
Many a strong man and a great,  
All that were.  
But do thou, sweet, otherwise,  
Having heed of all our prayer,  
Taking note of all our sighs ;  
We beseech thee by thy light,  
By thy bow, and thy sweet eyes,  
And the kingdom of the night,  
Be thou favourable and fair ;  
By thine arrows and thy might  
And Orion overthrown ;  
By the maiden thy delight,  
By the indissoluble zone  
And the sacred hair.

## MESSENGER

Maidens, if ye will sing now, shift your song,  
Bow down, cry, wail for pity ; is this a time  
For singing ? nay, for strewing of dust and ash,  
Rent raiment, and for bruising of the breast.

## CHORUS

What new thing wolf-like lurks behind thy words?  
What snake's tongue in thy lips? what fire in the  
eyes?

## MESSENGER

Bring me before the queen and I will speak.

## CHORUS

Lo, she comes forth as from thank-offering made.

## MESSENGER

A barren offering for a bitter gift.

## ALTHÆA

What are these borne on branches, and the face  
Covered? no mean men living, but now slain  
Such honour have they, if any dwell with death.

## MESSENGER

Queen, thy twain brethren and thy mother's sons.

## ALTHÆA

Lay down your dead till I behold their blood  
If it be mine indeed, and I will weep.

## MESSENGER

Weep if thou wilt, for these men shall no more.

## ALTHÆA

O brethren, O my father's sons, of me  
Well loved and well reputed, I should weep  
Tears dearer than the dear blood drawn from you  
But that I know you not uncomforted,  
Sleeping no shameful sleep, however slain,  
For my son surely hath avenged you dead.

MESSENGER

Nay, should thine own seed slay himself, O queen?

ALTHÆA

Thy double word brings forth a double death.

MESSENGER

Know this then singly, by one hand they fell.

ALTHÆA

What mutterest thou with thine ambiguous mouth?

MESSENGER

Slain by thy son's hand; is that saying so hard?

ALTHÆA

Our time is come upon us: it is here.

CHORUS

O miserable, and spoiled at thine own hand.

ALTHÆA

Wert thou not called Meleager from this womb?

CHORUS

A grievous huntsman hath it bred to thee.

ALTHÆA

Wert thou born fire, and shalt thou not devour?

CHORUS

The fire thou madest, will it consume even thee?

ALTHÆA

My dreams are fallen upon me; burn thou too.

## CHORUS

Not without God are visions born and die.

## ALTHÆA

The gods are many about me ; I am one.

## CHORUS

She groans as men wrestling with heavier gods.

## ALTHÆA

They rend me, they divide me, they destroy.

## CHORUS

Or one labouring in travail of strange births.

## ALTHÆA

They are strong, they are strong ; I am broken, and these prevail.

## CHORUS

The god is great against her ; she will die.

## ALTHÆA

Yea, but not now ; for my heart too is great.  
I would I were not here in sight of the sun.  
But thou, speak all thou sawest, and I will die.

## MESSENGER

O queen, for queenlike hast thou borne thyself,  
A little word may hold so great mischance.  
For in division of the sanguine spoil  
These men thy brethren wrangling bade yield up  
The boar's head and the horror of the hide  
That this might stand a wonder in Calydon,

Hallowed ; and some drew toward them ; but thy son  
With great hands grasping all that weight of hair  
Cast down the dead heap clanging and collapsed  
At female feet, saying This thy spoil not mine,  
Maiden, thine own hand for thyself hath reaped,  
And all this praise God gives thee : she thereat  
Laughed, as when dawn touches the sacred night  
The sky sees laugh and reddens and divide  
Dim lips and eyelids virgin of the sun,  
Hers, and the warm slow breasts of morning heave,  
Fruitful, and flushed with flame from lamp-lit hours,  
And maiden undulation of clear hair  
Colour the clouds ; so laughed she from pure heart,  
Lit with a low blush to the braided hair,  
And rose-coloured and cold like very dawn,  
Golden and godlike, chastely with chaste lips,  
A faint grave laugh ; and all they held their peace,  
And she passed by them. Then one cried Lo now,  
Shall not the Arcadian shoot out lips at us,  
Saying all we were despoiled by this one girl ?  
And all they rode against her violently  
And cast the fresh crown from her hair, and now  
They had rent her spoil away, dishonouring her,  
Save that Meleager, as a tame lion chafed,  
Bore on them, broke them, and as fire cleaves wood  
So clove and drove them, smitten in twain ; but she  
Smote not nor heaved up hand ; and this man first,  
Plexippus, crying out This for love's sake, sweet,  
Drove at Meleager, who with spear straightening  
Pierced his cheek through ; then Toxeus made for  
him,  
Dumb, but his spear spake ; vain and violent words.  
Fruitless ; for him too stricken through both sides  
The earth felt falling, and his horse's foam

Blanched thy son's face, his slayer ; and these being slain,

None moved nor spake ; but Æneus bade bear hence These made of heaven infatuate in their deaths, Foolish ; for these would baffle fate, and fell. And they passed on, and all men honoured her, Being honourable, as one revered of heaven.

#### ALTHÆA

What say you, women ? is all this not well done ?

#### CHORUS

No man doth well but God hath part in him.

#### ALTHÆA

But no part here ; for these my brethren born  
Ye have no part in, these ye know not of  
As I that was their sister, a sacrifice  
Slain in their slaying. I would I had died for these ;  
For this man dead walked with me, child by child,  
And made a weak staff for my feebler feet  
With his own tender wrist and hand, and held  
And led me softly and shewed me gold and steel  
And shining shapes of mirror and bright crown  
And all things fair ; and threw light spears, and  
brought

Young hounds to huddle at my feet and thrust  
Tame heads against my little maiden breasts  
And please me with great eyes ; and those days went  
And these are bitter and I a barren queen  
And sister miserable, a grievous thing  
And mother of many curses ; and she too,  
My sister Leda, sitting overseas  
With fair fruits round her, and her faultless lord,

Shall curse me, saying A sorrow and not a son,  
Sister, thou barest, even a burning fire,  
A brand consuming thine own soul and me.  
But ye now, sons of Thestius, make good cheer,  
For ye shall have such wood to funeral fire  
As no king hath ; and flame that once burnt down  
Oil shall not quicken or breath relume or wine  
Refresh again ; much costlier than fine gold,  
And more than many lives of wandering men.

## CHORUS

O queen, thou hast yet with thee love-worthy things,  
Thine husband, and the great strength of thy son.

## ALTHÆA

Who shall get brothers for me while I live ?  
Who bear them ? who bring forth in lieu of these ?  
Are not our fathers and our brethren one,  
And no man like them ? are not mine here slain ?  
Have we not hung together, he and I,  
Flowerwise feeding as the feeding bees,  
With mother-milk for honey ? and this man too,  
Dead, with my son's spear thrust between his sides,  
Hath he not seen us, later born than he,  
Laugh with lips filled, and laughed again for love ?  
There were no sons then in the world, nor spears,  
Nor deadly births of women ; but the gods  
Allowed us, and our days were clear of these.  
I would I had died unwedded, and brought forth  
No swords to vex the world ; for these that spake  
Sweet words long since and loved me will not speak  
Nor love nor look upon me ; and all my life  
I shall not hear nor see them living men.  
But I too living, how shall I now live ?

What life shall this be with my son, to know  
What hath been and desire what will not be,  
Look for dead eyes and listen for dead lips,  
And kill mine own heart with remembering them,  
And with those eyes that see their slayer alive  
Weep, and wring hands that clasp him by the hand ?  
How shall I bear my dreams of them, to hear  
False voices, feel the kisses of false mouths  
And footless sound of perished feet, and then  
Wake and hear only it may be their own hounds  
Whine masterless in miserable sleep,  
And see their boar-spears and their beds and seats  
And all the gear and housings of their lives  
And not the men ? shall hounds and horses mourn,  
Pine with strange eyes, and prick up hungry ears,  
Famish and fail at heart for their dear lords,  
And I not heed at all ? and those blind things  
Fall off from life for love's sake, and I live ?  
Surely some death is better than some life,  
Better one death for him and these and me  
For if the gods had slain them it may be  
I had endured it ; if they had fallen by war  
Or by the nets and knives of privy death  
And by hired hands while sleeping, this thing too  
I had set my soul to suffer ; or this hunt,  
Had this despatched them, under tusk or tooth  
Torn, sanguine, trodden, broken ; for all deaths  
Or honourable or with facile feet avenged  
And hands of swift gods following, all save this,  
Are bearable ; but not for their sweet land  
Fighting, but not a sacrifice, lo these  
Dead ; for I had not then shed all mine heart  
Out at mine eyes : then either with good speed,  
Being just, I had slain their slayer atoningly,

Or strewn with flowers their fire and on their tombs  
Hung crowns, and over them a song, and seen  
Their praise outflame their ashes : for all men,  
All maidens, had come thither, and from pure lips  
Shed songs upon them, from heroic eyes  
Tears ; and their death had been a deathless life ;  
But now, by no man hired nor alien sword,  
By their own kindred are they fallen, in peace,  
After much peril, friendless among friends,  
By hateful hands they loved ; and how shall mine  
Touch these returning red and not from war,  
These fatal from the vintage of men's veins,  
Dead men my brethren ? how shall these wash off  
No festal stains of undelightful wine,  
How mix the blood, my blood on them, with me,  
Holding mine hand ? or how shall I say, son,  
That am no sister ? but by night and day  
Shall we not sit and hate each other, and think  
Things hate-worthy ? not live with shamefast eyes,  
Brow-beaten, treading soft with fearful feet,  
Each unupbraided, each without rebuke  
Convicted, and without a word reviled  
Each of another ? and I shall let thee live  
And see thee strong and hear men for thy sake  
Praise me, but these thou wouldest not let live  
No man shall praise for ever ? these shall lie  
Dead, unbeloved, unholpen, all through thee ?  
Sweet were they toward me living, and mine heart  
Desired them, but was then well satisfied,  
That now is as men hungered ; and these dead  
I shall want always to the day I die.  
For all things else and all men may renew ;  
Yea, son for son the gods may give and take,  
But never a brother or sister any more.

## CHORUS

Nay, for the son lies close about thine heart,  
 Full of thy milk, warm from thy womb, and drains  
 Life and the blood of life and all thy fruit,  
 Eats thee and drinks thee as who breaks bread and  
     eats,  
 Treads wine and drinks, thyself, a sect of thee ;  
 And if he feed not, shall not thy flesh faint ?  
 Or drink not, are not thy lips dead for thirst ?  
 This thing moves more than all things, even thy son,  
 That thou cleave to him ; and he shall honour thee,  
 Thy womb that bare him and the breasts he knew,  
 Reverencing most for thy sake all his gods.

## ALTHÆA

But these the gods too gave me, and these my son,  
 Not reverencing his gods nor mine own heart  
 Nor the old sweet years nor all venerable things,  
 But cruel, and in his ravin like a beast,  
 Hath taken away to slay them : yea, and she  
 She the strange woman, she the flower, the sword,  
 Red from spilt blood, a mortal flower to men,  
 Adorable, detestable—even she  
 Saw with strange eyes and with strange lips rejoiced,  
 Seeing these mine own slain of mine own, and me  
 Made miserable above all miseries made,  
 A grief among all women in the world,  
 A name to be washed out with all men's tears.

## CHORUS

Strengthen thy spirit ; is this not also a god,  
 Chance, and the wheel of all necessities ?  
 Hard things have fallen upon us from harsh gods,  
 Whom lest worse hap rebuke we not for these.

## ALTHÆA

My spirit is strong against itself, and I  
 For these things' sake cry out on mine own soul  
 That it endures outrage, and dolorous days,  
 And life, and this inexpiable impotence.  
 Weak am I, weak and shameful ; my breath drawn  
 Shames me, and monstrous things and violent gods.  
 What shall atone ? what heal me ? what bring back  
 Strength to the foot, light to the face ? what herb  
 Assuage me ? what restore me ? what release ?  
 What strange thing eaten or drunken, O great gods,  
 Make me as you or as the beasts that feed,  
 Slay and divide and cherish their own hearts ?  
 For these ye show us ; and we less than these  
 Have not wherewith to live as all these things  
 Which all their lives fare after their own kind  
 As who doth well rejoicing ; but we ill,  
 Weeping or laughing, we whom eyesight fails,  
 Knowledge and light of face and perfect heart,  
 And hands we lack, and wit ; and all our days  
 Sin, and have hunger, and die infatuated.  
 For madness have ye given us and not health,  
 And sins whereof we know not ; and for these  
 Death, and sudden destruction unaware.  
 What shall we say now ? what thing comes of us ?

## CHORUS

Alas, for all this all men undergo.

## ALTHÆA

Wherefore I will not that these twain, O gods,  
 Die as a dog dies, eaten of creeping things,  
 Abominable, a loathing ; but though dead  
 Shall they have honour and such funereal flame

As strews men's ashes in their enemies' face  
And blinds their eyes who hate them : lest men say,  
" Lo how they lie, and living had great kin,  
And none of these hath pity of them, and none  
Regards them lying, and none is wrung at heart,  
None moved in spirit for them, naked and slain,  
Abhorred, abased, and no tears comfort them :"  
And in the dark this grieve Eurythemis,  
Hearing how these her sons come down to her  
Unburied, unavenged, as kinless men,  
And had a queen their sister. That were shame  
Worse than this grief. Yet how to atone at all  
I know not ; seeing the love of my born son,  
A new-made mother's new-born love, that grows  
From the soft child to the strong man, now soft  
Now strong as either, and still one sole same love,  
Strives with me, no light thing to strive withal ;  
This love is deep, and natural to man's blood,  
And ineffaceable with many tears.  
Yet shall not these rebuke me though I die,  
Nor she in that waste world with all her dead,  
My mother, among the pale flocks fallen as leaves,  
Folds of dead people, and alien from the sun ;  
Nor lack some bitter comfort, some poor praise,  
Being queen, to have borne her daughter like a queen,  
Righteous ; and though mine own fire burn me too,  
She shall have honour and these her sons, though dead.  
But all the gods will, all they do, and we  
Not all we would, yet somewhat ; and one choice  
We have, to live and do just deeds and die.

## CHORUS

Terrible words she communes with, and turns  
Swift fiery eyes in doubt against herself,  
And murmurs as who talks in dreams with death.

## ALTHÆA

For the unjust also dieth, and him all men  
 Hate, and himself abhors the unrighteousness,  
 And seeth his own dishonour intolerable.  
 But I being just, doing right upon myself,  
 Slay mine own soul, and no man born shames me.  
 For none constrains nor shall rebuke, being done,  
 What none compelled me doing ; thus these things  
 fare.

Ah, ah, that such things should so fare ; ah me,  
 That I am found to do them and endure,  
 Chosen and constrained to choose, and bear myself  
 Mine own wound through mine own flesh to the heart  
 Violently stricken, a spoiler and a spoil,  
 A ruin ruinous, fallen on mine own son.  
 Ah, ah, for me too as for these ; alas,  
 For that is done that shall be, and mine hand  
 Full of the deed, and full of blood mine eyes,  
 That shall see never nor touch anything  
 Save blood unstanch'd and fire unquenchable.

## CHORUS

What wilt thou do ? what ails thee ? for the house  
 Shakes ruinously ; wilt thou bring fire for it ?

## ALTHÆA

Fire in the roofs, and on the lintels fire.  
 Lo ye, who stand and weave, between the doors,  
 There ; and blood drips from hand and thread, and  
 stains  
 Threshold and raiment and me passing in  
 Flecked with the sudden sanguine drops of death.

## CHORUS

Alas that time is stronger than strong men,  
Fate than all gods : and these are fallen on us.

## ALTHÆA

A little since and I was glad ; and now  
I never shall be glad or sad again.

## CHORUS

Between two joys a grief grows unaware.

## ALTHÆA

A little while and I shall laugh ; and then  
I shall weep never and laugh not any more.

## CHORUS

What shall be said ? for words are thorns to grief.  
Withhold thyself a little and fear the gods.

## ALTHÆA

Fear died when these were slain ; and I am as dead,  
And fear is of the living ; these fear none.

## CHORUS

Have pity upon all people for their sake.

## ALTHÆA

It is done now ; shall I put back my day ?

## CHORUS

An end is come, an end ; this is of God.

## ALTHÆA

I am fire, and burn myself ; keep clear of fire,

## CHORUS

The house is broken, is broken ; it shall not stand.

## ALTHÆA

Woe, woe for him that breaketh ; and a rod  
Smote it of old, and now the axe is here.

## CHORUS

Not as with sundering of the earth  
 Nor as with cleaving of the sea  
 Nor fierce foreshadowings of a birth  
 Nor flying dreams of death to be  
 Nor loosening of the large world's girth  
 And quickening of the body of night,  
 And sound of thunder in men's ears  
 And fire of lightning in men's sight,  
 Fate, mother of desires and fears,  
 Bore unto men the law of tears ;  
 But sudden, an unfathered flame,  
 And broken out of night, she shone,  
 She, without body, without name,  
 In days forgotten and foregone ;  
 And heaven rang round her as she came  
 Like smitten cymbals, and lay bare ;  
 Clouds and great stars, thunders and snows,  
 The blue sad fields and folds of air,  
 The life that breathes, the life that grows,  
 All wind, all fire, that burns or blows,  
 Even all these knew her : for she is great ;  
 The daughter of doom, the mother of death,  
 The sister of sorrow ; a lifelong weight  
 That no man's finger lighteneneth,  
 Nor any god can lighten fate ;

A landmark seen across the way  
Where one race treads as the other trod ;  
An evil sceptre, an evil stay,  
Wrought for a staff, wrought for a rod,  
The bitter jealousy of God.

For death is deep as the sea,  
And fate as the waves thereof.  
Shall the waves take pity on thee  
Or the southwind offer thee love ?  
Wilt thou take the night for thy day  
Or the darkness for light on thy way,  
Till thou say in thine heart Enough ?  
Behold, thou art over fair, thou art over wise ;  
The sweetness of spring in thine hair, and the light  
in thine eyes.  
The light of the spring in thine eyes, and the sound  
in thine ears ;  
Yet thine heart shall wax heavy with sighs and thine  
eyelids with tears.  
Wilt thou cover thine hair with gold, and with silver  
thy feet ?  
Hast thou taken the purple to fold thee, and made  
thy mouth sweet ?  
Behold, when thy face is made bare, he that loved  
thee shall hate ;  
Thy face shall be no more fair at the fall of thy fate.  
For thy life shall fall as a leaf and be shed as the rain ;  
And the veil of thine head shall be grief ; and the  
crown shall be pain.

## ALTHÆA

Ho, ye that wail, and ye that sing, make way  
Till I be come among you. Hide your tears,

Ye little weepers, and your laughing lips,  
Ye laughers for a little ; lo mine eyes  
That outweep heaven at rainiest, and my mouth  
That laughs as gods laugh at us. Fate's are we,  
Yet fate is ours a breathing-space ; yea, mine,  
Fate is made mine for ever ; he is my son,  
My bedfellow, my brother. You strong gods,  
Give place unto me ; I am as any of you,  
To give life and to take life. Thou, old earth,  
That hast made man and unmade ; thou whose mouth  
Looks red from the eaten fruits of thine own womb ;  
Behold me with what lips upon what food  
I feed and fill my body ; even with flesh  
Made of my body. Lo, the fire I lit  
I burn with fire to quench it ; yea, with flame  
I burn up even the dust and ash thereof.

## CHORUS

Woman, what fire is this thou burnest with ?

## ALTHÆA

Yea to the bone, yea to the blood and all.

## CHORUS

For this thy face and hair are as one fire.

## ALTHÆA

A tongue that licks and beats upon the dust.

## CHORUS

And in thine eyes are hollow light and heat.

## ALTHÆA

Of flame not fed with hand or frankincense.

## CHORUS

I fear thee for the trembling of thine eyes,

## ALTHÆA

Neither with love they tremble nor for fear.

## CHORUS

And thy mouth shuddering like a shot bird.

## ALTHÆA

Not as the bride's mouth when man kisses it.

## CHORUS

Nay, but what thing is this thing thou hast done ?

## ALTHÆA

Look, I am silent, speak your eyes for me.

## CHORUS

I see a faint fire !ightening from the hall.

## ALTHÆA

Gaze, stretch your eyes, strain till the lids drop off.

## CHORUS

Flushed pillars down the flickering vestibule.

## ALTHÆA

Stretch with your necks like birds : cry, chirp as they.

## CHORUS

And a long brand that blackens : and white dust.

## ALTHÆA

O children, what is this ye see? your eyes  
 Are blinder than night's face at fall of moon.  
 That is my son, my flesh, my fruit of life,  
 My travail, and the year's weight of my womb.  
 Meleager, a fire enkindled of mine hands  
 And of mine hands extinguished ; this is he.

## CHORUS

O gods, what word has flown out at thy mouth?

## ALTHÆA

I did this and I say this and I die.

## CHORUS

Death stands upon the doorway of thy lips,  
 And in thy mouth has death set up his house.

## ALTHÆA

O death, a little, a little while, sweet death,  
 Until I see the brand burnt down and die.

## CHORUS

She reels as any reed under the wind,  
 And cleaves unto the ground with staggering feet.

## ALTHÆA

Girls, one thing will I say and hold my peace.  
 I that did this will weep not nor cry out,  
 Cry ye and weep : I will not call on gods,  
 Call ye on them ; I will not pity man,  
 Shew ye your pity. I know not if I live ;  
 Save that I feel the fire upon my face  
 And on my cheek the burning of a brand.

Yea the smoke bites me, yea I drink the steam  
With nostril and with eyelid and with lip  
Insatiate and intolerant ; and mine hands  
Burn, and fire feeds upon mine eyes ; I reel  
As one made drunk with living, whence he draws  
Drunken delight ; yet I, though mad for joy,  
Loathe my long living and am waxen red  
As with the shadow of shed blood ; behold,  
I am kindled with the flames that fade in him,  
I am swollen with subsiding of his veins,  
I am flooded with his ebbing ; my lit eyes  
Flame with the falling fire that leaves his lids  
Bloodless ; my cheek is luminous with blood  
Because his face is ashen. Yet, O child,  
Son, first-born, fairest—O sweet mouth, sweet eyes,  
That drew my life out through my suckling breast,  
That shone and clove mine heart through—O soft  
knees

Clinging, O tender treadings of soft feet,  
Cheeks warm with little kissings—O child, child,  
What have we made each other ? Lo, I felt  
Thy weight cleave to me, a burden of beauty, O son,  
Thy cradled brows and loveliest loving lips,  
The floral hair, the little lightening eyes,  
And all thy goodly glory ; with mine hands  
Delicately I fed thee, with my tongue  
Tenderly spake, saying, Verily in God's time,  
For all the little likeness of thy limbs,  
Son, I shall make thee a kingly man to fight,  
A lordly leader ; and hear before I die,  
“ She bore the goodliest sword of all the world.”  
Oh ! oh ! For all my life turns round on me ;  
I am severed from myself, my name is gone,  
My name that was a healing, it is changed,

My name is a consuming. From this time,  
Though mine eyes reach to the end of all these things,  
My lips shall not unfasten till I die.

## SEMICHORUS

She has filled with sighing the city,  
And the ways thereof with tears ;  
She arose, she girdled her sides,  
She set her face as a bride's ;  
She wept, and she had no pity ;  
Trembled, and felt no fears.

## SEMICHORUS

Her eyes were clear as the sun,  
Her brows were fresh as the day ;  
She girdled herself with gold,  
Her robes were manifold ;  
But the days of her worship are done,  
Her praise is taken away.

## SEMICHORUS

For she set her hand to the fire,  
With her mouth she kindled the same  
As the mouth of a flute-player,  
So was the mouth of her ;  
With the might of her strong desire  
She blew the breath of the flame.

## SEMICHORUS

She set her hand to the wood,  
She took the fire in her hand ;  
As one who is nigh to death,  
She panted with strange breath ;  
She opened her lips unto blood,  
She breathed and kindled the brand.

## SEMICHORUS

As a wood-dove newly shot,  
She sobbed and lifted her breast ;  
She sighed and covered her eyes,  
Filling her lips with sighs ;  
She sighed, she withdrew herself not,  
She refrained not, taking not rest ;

## SEMICHORUS

But as the wind which is drouth,  
And as the air which is death,  
As storm that severeth ships,  
Her breath severing her lips,  
The breath came forth of her mouth  
And the fire came forth of her breath,

## SECOND MESSENGER

Queen, and you maidens, there is come on us  
A thing more deadly than the face of death ;  
Meleager the good lord is as one slain.

## SEMICHORUS

Without sword, without sword is he stricken ;  
Slain, and slain without hand.

## SECOND MESSENGER

For as keen ice divided of the sun  
His limbs divide, and as thawed snow the flesh  
Thaws from off all his body to the hair.

## SEMICHORUS

He wastes as the embers quicken ;  
With the brand he fades as a brand.

## SECOND MESSENGER

Even while they sang and all drew hither and he  
Lifted both hands to crown the Arcadian's hair  
And fix the looser leaves, both hands fell down.

## SEMICHORUS

With rending of cheek and of hair  
Lament ye, mourn for him, weep.

## SECOND MESSENGER

Straightway the crown slid off and smote on earth,  
First fallen ; and he, grasping his own hair, groaned  
And cast his raiment round his face and fell.

## SEMICHORUS

Alas for visions that were,  
And soothsayings spoken in sleep.

## SECOND MESSENGER

But the king twitched his reins in and leapt down  
And caught him, crying out twice "O child" and  
    thrice,  
So that men's eyelids thickened with their tears.

## SEMICHORUS

Lament with a long lamentation,  
Cry, for an end is at hand.

## SECOND MESSENGER

O son, he said, son, lift thine eyes, draw breath,  
Pity me ; but Meleager with sharp lips  
Gasped, and his face waxed like as sunburnt grass.

## SEMICHORUS

Cry aloud, O thou kingdom, O nation,  
O stricken, a ruinous land.

## SECOND MESSENGER

Whereat king Æneus, straightening feeble knees,  
With feeble hands heaved up a lessening weight,  
And laid him sadly in strange hands, and wept.

## SEMICHORUS

Thou art smitten, her lord, her desire,  
Thy dear blood wasted as rain.

## SECOND MESSENGER

And they with tears and rendings of the beard  
Bear hither a breathing body, wept upon  
And lightening at each footfall, sick to death.

## SEMICHORUS

Thou madest thy sword as a fire,  
With fire for a sword thou art slain.

## SECOND MESSENGER

And lo, the feast turned funeral, and the crowns  
Fallen ; and the huntress and the hunter trapped ;  
And weeping and changed faces and veiled hair.

## MELEAGER

Let your hands meet  
Round the weight of my head ;  
Lift ye my feet  
As the feet of the dead ;

For the flesh of my body is molten, the limbs of it  
molten as lead.

## CHORUS

O thy luminous face,  
 Thine imperious eyes !  
 O the grief, O the grace,  
 As of day when it dies !

Who is this bending over thee, lord, with tears and  
 suppression of sighs ?

## MELEAGER

Is a bride so fair ?  
 Is a maid so meek ?  
 With unchapleted hair,  
 With unfilleted cheek,

Atalanta, the pure among women, whose name is as  
 blessing to speak.

## ATALANTA

I would that with feet  
 Unsandalled, unshod,  
 Overbold, overfleet,  
 I had swum not nor trod  
 From Arcadia to Calydon northward, a blast of the  
 envy of God.

## MELEAGER

Unto each man his fate ;  
 Unto each as he saith  
 In whose fingers the weight  
 Of the world is as breath ;

Yet I would that in clamour of battle mine hands had  
 laid hold upon death.

## CHORUS

Not with cleaving of shields  
 And their clash in thine ear,  
 When the lord of fought fields  
 Breaketh spearshaft from spear,  
 Thou art broken, our lord, thou art broken, with  
 travail and labour and fear.

## MELEAGER

Would God he had found me  
 Beneath fresh boughs !  
 Would God he had bound me  
 Unawares in mine house,  
 With light in mine eyes, and songs in my lips, and a  
 crown on my brows !

## CHORUS

Whence art thou sent from us ?  
 Whither thy goal ?  
 How art thou rent from us,  
 Thou that wert whole,  
 As with severing of eyelids and eyes, as with sunder-  
 ing of body and soul !

## MELEAGER

My heart is within me  
 As an ash in the fire ;  
 Whosoever hath seen me,  
 Without lute, without lyre,  
 Shall sing of me grievous things, even things that  
 were ill to desire.

## CHORUS

Who shall raise thee  
 From the house of the dead?  
 Or what man praise thee  
 That thy praise may be said?  
 Alas thy beauty ! alas thy body ! alas thine head !

## MELEAGER

But thou, O mother,  
 The dreamer of dreams,  
 Wilt thou bring forth another  
 To feel the sun's beams  
 When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail  
 by impassable streams ?

## ŒNEUS

What thing wilt thou leave me  
 Now this thing is done ?  
 A man wilt thou give me,  
 A son for my son,  
 For the light of mine eyes, the desire of my life, the  
 desirable one ?

## CHORUS

Thou wert glad above others,  
 Yea, fair beyond word ;  
 Thou wert glad among mothers ;  
 For each man that heard  
 Of thee, praise there was added unto thee, as wings  
 to the feet of a bird.

## ŒNEUS

Who shall give back  
Thy face of old years,  
With travail made black,  
Grown grey among fears,  
Mother of sorrow, mother of cursing, mother of  
tears ?

## MELEAGER

Though thou art as fire  
Fed with fuel in vain,  
My delight, my desire,  
Is more chaste than the rain,  
More pure than the dewfall, more holy than stars are  
that live without stain.

## ATALANTA

I would that as water  
My life's blood had thawn,  
Or as winter's wan daughter  
Leaves lowland and lawn  
Spring-stricken, or ever mine eyes had beheld thee  
made dark in thy dawn.

## CHORUS

When thou dravest the men  
Of the chosen of Thrace,  
None turned him again  
Nor endured he thy face  
Clothed round with the blush of the battle, with light  
from a terrible place.

## ŒNEUS

Thou shouldst die as he dies  
 For whom none sheddeth tears ;  
 Filling thine eyes  
 And fulfilling thine ears

With the brilliance of battle, the bloom and the  
 beauty, the splendour of spears.

## CHORUS

In the ears of the world  
 It is sung, it is told,  
 And the light thereof hurled  
 And the noise thereof rolled

From the Acroceraunian snow to the ford of the  
 fleece of gold.

## MELEAGER

Would God ye could carry me  
 Forth of all these ;  
 Heap sand and bury me  
 By the Chersonese

Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the  
 thunder of Pontic seas.

## ŒNEUS

Dost thou mock at our praise  
 And the singing begun  
 And the men of strange days  
 Praising my son

In the folds of the hills of home, high places of  
 Calydon ?

## MELEAGER

For the dead man no home is ;

    Ah, better to be

What the flower of the foam is

    In fields of the sea,

That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the  
gulf-stream a garment for me.

## CHORUS

Who shall seek thee and bring

    And restore thee thy day,

When the dove dipt her wing

    And the oars won their way

Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the  
straits of Propontis with spray ?

## MELEAGER

Will ye crown me my tomb

    Or exalt me my name,

Now my spirits consume,

    Now my flesh is a flame ?

Let the sea slake it once, and men speak of me sleep-  
ing to praise me or shame.

## CHORUS

Turn back now, turn thee,

    As who turns him to wake ;

Though the life in thee burn thee,

    Couldst thou bathe it and slake

Where the sea-ridge of Helle hangs heavier, and east  
upon west waters break ?

## MELEAGER

Would the winds blow me back  
     Or the waves hurl me home?  
     Ah, to touch in the track  
         Where the pine learnt to roam  
 Cold girdles and crowns of the sea-gods, cool  
     blossoms of water and foam !

## CHORUS

The gods may release  
     That they made fast ;  
     Thy soul shall have ease  
         In thy limbs at the last ;  
 But what shall they give thee for life, sweet life that  
     is overpast ?

## MELEAGER

Not the life of men's veins,  
     Not of flesh that conceives ;  
     But the grace that remains,  
         The fair beauty that cleaves  
 To the life of the rains in the grasses, the life of the  
     dews on the leaves.

## CHORUS

Thou wert helmsman and chief ;  
     Wilt thou turn in an hour,  
     Thy limbs to the leaf,  
         Thy face to the flower,  
 Thy blood to the water, thy soul to the gods who  
     divide and devour ?

## MELEAGER

The years are hungry,  
They wail all their days ;  
The gods wax angry  
And weary of praise ;

And who shall bridle their lips ? and who shall straiten  
their ways ?

## CHORUS

The gods guard over us  
With sword and with rod ;  
Weaving shadow to cover us,  
Heaping the sod,

That law may fulfil herself wholly, to darken man's  
face before God.

## MELEAGER

O holy head of Æneus, lo thy son  
Guiltless, yet red from alien guilt, yet foul  
With kinship of contaminated lives,  
Lo, for their blood I die ; and mine own blood  
For bloodshedding of mine is mixed therewith,  
That death may not discern me from my kin.  
Yet with clean heart I die and faultless hand,  
Not shamefully ; thou therefore of thy love  
Salute me, and bid fare among the dead  
Well, as the dead fare ; for the best man dead  
Fares sadly ; nathless I now faring well  
Pass without fear where nothing is to fear  
Having thy love about me and thy goodwill,  
O father, among dark places and men dead.

## ŒNEUS

Child, I salute thee with sad heart and tears,  
And bid thee comfort, being a perfect man  
In fight, and honourable in the house of peace.  
The gods give thee fair wage and dues of death,  
And me brief days and ways to come at thee.

## MELEAGER

Pray thou thy days be long before thy death,  
And full of ease and kingdom ; seeing in death  
There is no comfort and none aftergrowth,  
Nor shall one thence look up and see day's dawn  
Nor light upon the land whither I go.  
Live thou and take thy fill of days and die  
When thy day comes ; and make not much of death  
Lest ere thy day thou reap an evil thing.  
Thou too, the bitter mother and mother-plague  
Of this my weary body—thou too, queen,  
The source and end, the sower and the scythe,  
The rain that ripens and the drought that slays,  
The sand that swallows and the spring that feeds,  
To make me and unmake me—thou, I say,  
Althæa, since my father's ploughshare, drawn  
Through fatal seedland of a female field,  
Furrowed thy body, whence a wheaten ear  
Strong from the sun and fragrant from the rains  
I sprang and cleft the closure of thy womb,  
Mother, I dying with unforgettable tongue  
Hail thee as holy and worship thee as just  
Who art unjust and unholy ; and with my knees  
Would worship, but thy fire and subtlety,  
Dissundering them, devour me ; for these limbs  
Are as light dust and crumblings from mine urn

Before the fire has touched them ; and my face  
As a dead leaf or dead foot's mark on snow,  
And all this body a broken barren tree  
That was so strong, and all this flower of life  
Disbranched and desecrated miserably,  
And diminished all that god-like muscle and might  
And lesser than a man's : for all my veins  
Fail me, and all mine ashen life burns down.  
I would thou hadst let me live ; but gods averse,  
But fortune, and the fiery feet of change,  
And time, these would not, these tread out my life,  
These and not thou ; me too thou hast loved, and I  
Thee ; but this death was mixed with all my life,  
Mine end with my beginning : and this law,  
This only, slays me, and not my mother at all.  
And let no brother or sister grieve too sore,  
Nor melt their hearts out on me with their tears,  
Since extreme love and sorrowing overmuch  
Vex the great gods, and overloving men  
Slay and are slain for love's sake ; and this house  
Shall bear much better children ; why should these  
Weep ? but in patience let them live their lives  
And mine pass by forgotten : thou alone,  
Mother, thou sole and only, thou not these,  
Keep me in mind a little when I die  
Because I was thy first-born ; let thy soul  
Pity me, pity even me gone hence and dead,  
Though thou wert wroth, and though thou bear again  
Much happier sons, and all men later born  
Exceedingly excel me ; yet do thou  
Forget not, nor think shame ; I was thy son.  
Time was I did not shame thee ; and time was  
I thought to live and make thee honourable  
With deeds as great as these men's ; but they live,

These, and I die ; and what thing should have been  
Surely I know not ; yet I charge thee, seeing  
I am dead already, love me not the less,  
Me, O my mother ; I charge thee by these gods,  
My father's, and that holier breast of thine,  
By these that see me dying, and that which nursed,  
Love me not less, thy first-born : though grief come,  
Grief only, of me, and of all these great joy,  
And shall come always to thee ; for thou knowest,  
O mother, O breasts that bare me, for ye know,  
O sweet head of my mother, sacred eyes,  
Ye know my soul albeit I sinned, ye know  
Albeit I kneel not neither touch thy knees,  
But with my lips I kneel, and with my heart  
I fall about thy feet and worship thee.  
And ye farewell now, all my friends ; and ye,  
Kinsmen, much younger and glorious more than I,  
Sons of my mother's sister ; and all farewell  
That were in Colchis with me, and bare down  
The waves and wars that met us : and though times  
Change, and though now I be not anything,  
Forget not me among you, what I did  
In my good time ; for even by all those days,  
Those days and this, and your own living souls,  
And by the light and luck of you that live,  
And by this miserable spoil, and me  
Dying, I beseech you, let my name not die.  
But thou, dear, touch me with thy rose-like hands,  
And fasten up mine eyelids with thy mouth,  
A bitter kiss ; and grasp me with thine arms,  
Printing with heavy lips my light waste flesh,  
Made light and thin by heavy-handed fate,  
And with thine holy maiden eyes drop dew,  
Drop tears for dew upon me who am dead,

Me who have loved thee ; seeing without sin done  
I am gone down to the empty weary house  
Where no flesh is nor beauty nor swift eyes  
Nor sound of mouth nor might of hands and feet.  
But thou, dear, hide my body with thy veil,  
And with thy raiment cover foot and head,  
And stretch thyself upon me and touch hands  
With hands and lips with lips : be pitiful  
As thou art maiden perfect ; let no man  
Defile me to despise me, saying, This man  
Died woman-wise, a woman's offering, slain  
Through female fingers in his woof of life,  
Dishonourable ; for thou hast honoured me.  
And now for God's sake kiss me once and twice  
And let me go ; for the night gathers me,  
And in the night shall no man gather fruit

## ATALANTA

Hail thou : but I with heavy face and feet  
Turn homeward and am gone out of thine eyes.

## CHORUS

Who shall contend with his lords  
Or cross them or do them wrong ?  
Who shall bind them as with cords ?  
Who shall tame them as with song ?  
Who shall smite them as with swords ?  
For the hands of their kingdom are strong.



# ERECHTHEUS

## A TRAGEDY

ὦ ταὶ Λικαράι καὶ ἰστέφανοι καὶ ἀσιθήκοι,  
Ἐλλάδος ἔρεισμα, κλειναὶ Ἀθῆναι, δαιμόνιον πτολίεθρον.

PIND. Fr. 47.

ΑΤ. τίς δὲ ποιμάνωρ ἔπεστι κὰπιδεσπόζει στρατοῦ;  
ΧΟ. οὐτινος δοῦλοι κέκληνται φωτὸς οὐδ' ὑπηκόοι.

ÆSCH. Pers. 241-2.



TO

MY MOTHER



## PERSONS

ERECHTHEUS.

CHORUS OF ATHENIAN ELDERS

PRAXITHEA.

CHTHONIA.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

MESSENGER.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

ATHENA.



## ERECHTHEUS

### ERECHTHEUS

MOTHER of life and death and all men's days,  
Earth, whom I chief of all men born would bless,  
And call thee with more loving lips than theirs  
Mother, for of this very body of thine  
And living blood I have my breath and live,  
Behold me, even thy son, me crowned of men,  
Me made thy child by that strong cunning God  
Who fashions fire and iron, who begat  
Me for a sword and beacon-fire on thee,  
Me fosterling of Pallas, in her shade  
Reared, that I first might pay the nursing debt,  
Hallowing her fame with flower of third-year feasts,  
And first bow down the bridled strength of steeds  
To lose the wild wont of their birth, and bear  
Clasp of man's knees and steerage of his hand,  
Or fourfold service of his fire-swift wheels  
That whirl the four-yoked chariot ; me the king  
Who stand before thee naked now, and cry,  
O holy and general mother of all men born,  
But mother most and motherliest of mine,  
Earth, for I ask thee rather of all the Gods,  
What have we done ? what word mistimed or work  
Hath winged the wild feet of this timeless curse  
To fall as fire upon us ? Lo, I stand

Here on this brow's crown of the city's head  
That crowns its lovely body, till death's hour  
Waste it ; but now the dew of dawn and birth  
Is fresh upon it from thy womb, and we  
Behold it born how beauteous ; one day more  
I see the world's wheel of the circling sun  
Roll up rejoicing to regard on earth  
This one thing goodliest, fair as heaven or he,  
Worth a God's gaze or strife of Gods ; but now  
Would this day's ebb of their spent wave of strife  
Sweep it to sea, wash it on wreck, and leave  
A costless thing contemned ; and in our stead,  
Where these walls were and sounding streets of men,  
Make wide a waste for tongueless water-herds  
And spoil of ravening fishes ; that no more  
Should men say, Here was Athens. This shalt thou  
Sustain not, nor thy son endure to see,  
Nor thou to live and look on ; for the womb  
Bare me not base that bare me miserable,  
To hear this loud brood of the Thracian foam  
Break its broad strength of billowy-beating war  
Here, and upon it as a blast of death  
Blowing, the keen wrath of a fire-souled king,  
A strange growth grafted on our natural soil,  
A root of Thrace in Eleusinian earth  
Set for no comfort to the kindly land,  
Son of the sea's lord and our first-born foe,  
Eumolpus ; nothing sweet in ears of thine  
The music of his making, nor a song  
Toward hopes of ours auspicious ; for the note  
Rings as for death oracular to thy sons  
That goes before him on the sea-wind blown  
Full of this charge laid on me, to put out  
The brief light kindled of mine own child's life,

Or with this helmsman hand that steers the state  
Run right on the under shoal and ridge of death  
The populous ship with all its fraughtage gone  
And sails that were to take the wind of time  
Rent, and the tackling that should hold out fast  
In confluent surge of loud calamities  
Broken, with spars of rudders and lost oars  
That were to row toward harbour and find rest  
In some most glorious haven of all the world  
And else may never near it: such a song  
The Gods have set his lips on fire withal  
Who threatens now in all their names to bring  
Ruin; but none of these, thou knowest, have I  
Chid with my tongue or cursed at heart for grief,  
Knowing how the soul runs reinless on sheer death  
Whose grief or joy takes part against the Gods.  
And what they will is more than our desire,  
And their desire is more than what we will.  
For no man's will and no desire of man's  
Shall stand as doth a God's will. Yet, O fair  
Mother, that seest me how I cast no word  
Against them, plead no reason, crave no cause,  
Boast me not blameless, nor beweep me wronged,  
By this fair wreath of towers we have decked thee  
with,

This chaplet that we give thee woven of walls,  
This girdle of gate and temple and citadel  
Drawn round beneath thy bosom, and fast linked  
As to thine heart's root—this dear crown of thine.  
This present light, this city—be not thou  
Slow to take heed nor slack to strengthen her,  
Fare we so short-lived howsoe'er, and pay  
What price we may to ransom thee thy town,  
Not me my life; but thou that diest not, thou,

Though all our house die for this people's sake,  
 Keep thou for ours thy crown our city, guard  
 And give it life the lovelier that we died.

## CHORUS.

Sun, that hast lightened and loosed by thy might  
 Ocean and Earth from the lordship of night,  
 Quicken with vision his eye that was veiled,  
 Freshening the force in her heart that had failed,  
 That sister fettered and blinded brother  
 Should have sight by thy grace and delight of each  
 other,

Behold now and see

What profit is given them of thee ;

What wrath has enkindled with madness of mind  
 Her limbs that were bounden, his face that was blind,  
 To be locked as in wrestle together, and lighten  
 With fire that shall darken thy fire in the sky,  
 Body to body and eye against eye

In a war against kind,

Till the bloom of her fields and her high hills whiten

With the foam of his waves more high.

For the sea-marks set to divide of old

The kingdoms to Ocean and Earth assigned,  
 The hoar sea-fields from the cornfields' gold,  
 His wine-bright waves from her vineyards' fold,

Frail forces we find

To bridle the spirit of Gods or bind

Till the heat of their hearts wax cold.

But the peace that was established between them to  
 stand

Is rent now in twain by the strength of his hand  
 Who stirs up the storm of his sons overbold  
 To pluck from fight what he lost of right,

By council and judgment of Gods that spake  
And gave great Pallas the strife's fair stake,  
The lordship and love of the lovely land,  
The grace of the town that hath on it for crown

But a headband to wear

Of violets one-hued with her hair :

For the vales and the green high places of earth  
Hold nothing so fair,

And the depths of the sea bear no such birth  
Of the manifold births they bear.

Too well, too well was the great stake worth  
A strife divine for the Gods to judge,  
A crowned God's triumph, a foiled God's grudge,  
Though the loser be strong and the victress wise  
Who played long since for so large a prize,

The fruitful immortal anointed adored

Dear city of men without master or lord,  
Fair fortress and fostress of sons born free,  
Who stand in her sight and in thine, O sun,  
Slaves of no man, subjects of none ;

A wonder enthroned on the hills and sea,

A maiden crowned with a fourfold glory

That none from the pride of her head may rend,

Violet and olive-leaf purple and hoary,

Song-wreath and story the fairest of fame,

Flowers that the winter can blast not or bend ;

A light upon earth as the sun's own flame,

A name as his name,

Athens, a praise without end.

A noise is arisen against us of waters,

[Str. 1.

A sound as of battle come up from the sea.

Strange hunters are hard on us, hearts without pity ;  
They have staked their nets round the fair young city,

That the sons of her strength and her virgin daughters

Should find not whither alive to flee.

And we know not yet of the word unwritten, [Ant. 1.

The doom of the Pythian we have not heard ;  
From the navel of earth and the veiled mid altar  
We wait for a token with hopes that falter,  
With fears that hang on our hearts thought-smitten

Lest her tongue be kindled with no good word.

O thou not born of the womb, nor bred [Str. 2.

In the bride-night's warmth of a changed God's bed,  
But thy life as a lightning was flashed from the light  
of thy father's head,

O chief God's child by a motherless birth,

If aught in thy sight we indeed be worth,

Keep death from us thou, that art none of the Gods  
of the dead under earth.

Thou that hast power on us, save, if thou wilt ; [Ant. 2.

Let the blind wave breach not thy wall scarce  
built ;

But bless us not so as by bloodshed, impute not for  
grace to us guilt,

Nor by price of pollution of blood set us free ;

Let the hands be taintless that clasp thy knee,

Nor a maiden be slain to redeem for a maiden her  
shrine from the sea.

O earth, O sun, turn back

[Str. 3.

Full on his deadly track

Death, that would smite you black and mar your  
creatures,

And with one hand disroot

All tender flower and fruit,

With one strike blind and mute the heaven's fair  
features.

Pluck out the eyes of morn, and make  
 Silence in the east and blackness whence the bright  
 songs break.

Help, earth, help, heaven, that hear [Ant. 3.  
 The song-notes of our fear,  
 Shrewd notes and shrill, not clear or joyful-sounding ;  
 Hear, highest of Gods, and stay  
 Death on his hunter's way,  
 Full on his forceless prey his beagles hounding ;  
 Break thou his bow, make short his hand,  
 Maim his fleet foot whose passage kills the living  
 land.

Let a third wave smite not us, father, [Str. 4.  
 Long since sore smitten of twain,  
 Lest the house of thy son's son perish  
 And his name be barren on earth.

Whose race wilt thou comfort rather  
 If none to thy son remain ?  
 Whose seed wilt thou choose to cherish  
 If his be cut off in the birth ?

For the first fair graft of his grafting [Ant. 4.  
 Was rent from its maiden root  
 By the strong swift hand of a lover  
 Who fills the night with his breath ;  
 On the lip of the stream low-laughing  
 Her green soft virginal shoot  
 Was plucked from the stream-side cover  
 By the grasp of a love like death.

For a God's was the mouth that kissed her [Str. 5.  
 Who speaks, and the leaves lie dead,  
 When winter awakes as at warning  
 To the sound of his foot from Thrace.  
 Nor happier the bed of her sister  
 Though Love's self laid her abed

## ERECHTHEUS

By a bridegroom beloved of the morning  
 And fair as the dawn's own face.

For Procris, ensnared and ensnaring [Ant. 5.]

By the fraud of a twofold wile,  
 With the point of her own spear stricken  
 By the gift of her own hand fell.

Oversubtle in doubts, overdaring

In deeds and devices of guile,  
 And strong to quench as to quicken,  
 O Love, have we named thee well ?

By thee was the spear's edge whetted [Str. 6.]

That laid her dead in the dew,  
 In the moist green glens of the midland  
 By her dear lord slain and thee.

And him at the cliff's end fretted

By the grey keen waves, him too,  
 Thine hand from the white-browed headland  
 Flung down for a spoil to the sea.

But enough now of griefs grey-growing [Ant. 6.]

Have darkened the house divine,  
 Have flowered on its boughs and faded,  
 And green is the brave stock yet.

O father all seeing and all knowing,

Let the last fruit fall not of thine  
 From the tree with whose boughs we are  
 shaded,  
 From the stock that thy son's hand set.

## ERECHTHEUS

O daughter of Cephisus, from all time  
 Wise have I found thee, wife and queen, of heart  
 Perfect ; nor in the days that knew not wind  
 Nor days when storm blew death upon our peace

Was thine heart swoln with seed of pride, or bowed  
 With blasts of bitter fear that break men's souls  
 Who lift too high their minds toward heaven, in  
 thought

Too godlike grown for worship ; but of mood  
 Equal, in good time reverent of time bad,  
 And glad in ill days of the good that were.  
 Nor now too would I fear thee, now misdoubt  
 Lest fate should find thee lesser than thy doom,  
 Chosen if thou be to bear and to be great  
 Haply beyond all women ; and the word  
 Speaks thee divine, dear queen, that speaks thee dead,  
 Dead being alive, or quick and dead in one  
 Shall not men call thee living ? yet I fear  
 To slay thee timeless with my proper tongue,  
 With lips, thou knowest, that love thee ; and such  
 work  
 Was never laid of Gods on men, such word  
 No mouth of man learnt ever, as from mine  
 Most loth to speak thine ear most loth shall take  
 And hold it hateful as the grave to hear.

## PRAXITHEA

That word there is not in all speech of man,  
 King, that being spoken of the Gods and thee  
 I have not heart to honour, or dare hold  
 More than I hold thee or the Gods in hate  
 Hearing ; but if my heart abhor it heard  
 Being insubmissive, hold me not thy wife  
 But use me like a stranger, whom thine hand  
 Hath fed by chance and finding thence no thanks  
 Flung off for shame's sake to forgetfulness.

## ERECHTHEUS

## ERECHTHEUS

O, of what breath shall such a word be made,  
Or from what heart find utterance? Would my  
tongue

Were rent forth rather from the quivering root  
Than made as fire or poison thus for thee.

## PRAXITHEA

But if thou speak of blood, and I that hear  
Be chosen of all for this land's love to die  
And save to thee thy city, know this well,  
Happiest I hold me of her seed alive.

## ERECHTHEUS

O sun that seest, what saying was this of thine,  
God, that thy power has breathed into my lips?  
For from no sunlit shrine darkling it came.

## PRAXITHEA

What portent from the mid oracular place  
Hath smitten thee so like a curse that flies  
Wingless, to waste men with its plagues? yet speak.

## ERECHTHEUS

Thy blood the Gods require not; take this first.

## PRAXITHEA

To me than thee more grievous this should sound.

## ERECHTHEUS

That word rang truer and bitterer than it knew.

## PRAXITHEA

This is not then thy grief, to see me die?

ERECHTHEUS

Die shalt thou not, yet give thy blood to death.

PRAXITHEA

If this ring worse I know not ; strange it rang.

ERECHTHEUS

Alas, thou knowest not ; woe is me that know.

PRAXITHEA

And woe shall mine be, knowing ; yet halt not here.

ERECHTHEUS

Guiltless of blood this state may stand no more.

PRAXITHEA

Firm let it stand whatever bleed or fall.

ERECHTHEUS

O Gods, that I should say it shall and weep.

PRAXITHEA

Weep, and say this ? no tears should bathe such words.

ERECHTHEUS

Woe's me that I must weep upon them, woe.

PRAXITHEA

What stain is on them for thy tears to cleanse ?

ERECHTHEUS

A stain of blood unpurgeable with tears.

PRAXITHEA

Whence ? for thou sayest it is and is not mine.

## ERECHTHEUS

Hear then and know why only of all men I  
That bring such news as mine is, I alone  
Must wash good words with weeping ; I and thou,  
Woman, must wail to hear men sing, must groan  
To see their joy who love us; all our friends  
Save only we, and all save we that love  
This holiness of Athens, in our sight  
Shall lift their hearts up, in our hearing praise  
Gods whom we may not ; for to these they give  
Life of their children, flower of all their seed,  
For all their travail fruit, for all their hopes  
Harvest ; but we for all our good things, we  
Have at their hands which fill all these folk full  
Death, barrenness, child-slaughter, curses, cares,  
Sea-leaguer and land-shipwreck ; which of these,  
Which wilt thou first give thanks for ? all are thine.

## PRAXITHEA

What first they give who give this city good,  
For that first given to save it I give thanks  
First, and thanks heartier from a happier tongue,  
More than for any my peculiar grace  
Shown me and not my country ; next for this  
That none of all these but for all these I  
Must bear my burden, and no eye but mine  
Weep of all women's in this broad land born  
Who see their land's deliverance ; but much more,  
But most for this I thank them most of all,  
That this their edge of doom is chosen to pierce  
My heart and not my country's ; for the sword  
Drawn to smite there and sharpened for such stroke  
Should wound more deep than any turned on me.

## CHORUS

Well fares the land that bears such fruit, and well  
The spirit that breeds such thought and speech in man.

## ERECHTHEUS

O woman, thou hast shamed my heart with thine,  
To show so strong a patience ; take then all ;  
For all shall break not nor bring down thy soul.  
The word that journeying to the bright God's shrine  
Who speaks askance and darkling, but his name  
Hath in it slaying and ruin broad writ out,  
I heard, hear thou : thus saith he ; There shall die  
One soul for all this people ; from thy womb  
Came forth the seed that here on dry bare ground  
Death's hand must sow untimely, to bring forth  
Nor blade nor shoot in season, being by name  
To the under Gods made holy, who require  
For this land's life her death and maiden blood  
To save a maiden city. Thus I heard,  
And thus with all said leave thee ; for save this  
No word is left us, and no hope alive.

## CHORUS

He hath uttered too surely his wrath not obscurely,  
nor wrapt as in mists of his breath, [Str.

The master that lightens not hearts he enlightens, but  
gives them foreknowledge of death.

As a bolt from the cloud hath he sent it aloud and  
proclaimed it afar,

From the darkness and height of the horror of night  
hath he shown us a star.

Star may I name it and err not, or flame shall I say,  
Born of the womb that was born for the tomb  
of the day ?

O Night, whom other but thee for mother, and Death  
for the father, Night, [Ant.

Shall we dream to discover, save thee and thy lover,  
to bring such a sorrow to sight?

From the slumberless bed for thy bedfellow spread  
and his bride under earth

Hast thou brought forth a wild and insatiable child,  
an unbearable birth.

Fierce are the fangs of his wrath, and the pangs  
that they give;

None is there, none that may bear them, not one  
that would live.

#### CHTHONIA

Forth of the fine-spun folds of veils that hide  
My virgin chamber toward the full-faced sun  
I set my foot not moved of mine own will,  
Unmaidenlike, nor with unprompted speed  
Turn eyes too broad or doglike unabashed  
On reverend heads of men and thence on thine,  
Mother, now covered from the light and bowed  
As hers who mourns her brethren; but what grief  
Bends thy blind head thus earthward, holds thus mute,  
I know not till thy will be to lift up  
Toward mine thy sorrow-muffled eyes and speak;  
And till thy will be would I know this not.

#### PRAXITHEA

Old men and childless, or if sons ye have seen  
And daughters, elder-born were these than mine,  
Look on this child, how young of years, how sweet,  
How scant of time and green of age her life  
Puts forth its flower of girlhood; and her gait  
How virginal, how soft her speech, her eyes

How seemly smiling ; wise should all ye be,  
 All honourable and kindly men of age ;  
 Now give me counsel and one word to say  
 That I may bear to speak, and hold my peace  
 Henceforth for all time even as all ye now.  
 Dumb are ye all, bowed eyes and tongueless mouths,  
 Unprofitable ; if this were wind that speaks,  
 As much its breath might move you. Thou then,  
 child,  
 Set thy sweet eyes on mine ; look through them well ;  
 Take note of all the writing of my face  
 As of a tablet or a tomb inscribed  
 That bears me record ; lifeless now, my life  
 Thereon that was think written ; brief to read,  
 Yet shall the scripture sear thine eyes as fire  
 And leave them dark as dead men's. Nay, dear child,  
 Thou hast no skill, my maiden, and no sense  
 To take such knowledge ; sweet is all thy lore,  
 And all this bitter ; yet I charge thee learn  
 And love and lay this up within thine heart,  
 Even this my word ; less ill it were to die  
 Than live and look upon thy mother dead,  
 Thy mother-land that bare thee ; no man slain  
 But him who hath seen it shall men count unblest,  
 None blest as him who hath died and seen it not.

## CHTHONIA

That sight some God keep from me though I die.

## PRAXITHEA

A God from thee shall keep it ; fear not this.

## CHTHONIA

Thanks all my life long shall he gain of mine.

PRAXITHEA

Short gain of all yet shall he get of thee,

CHTHONIA

Brief be my life, yet so long live my thanks.

PRAXITHEA

So long? so little; how long shall they live?

CHTHONIA

Even while I see the sunlight and thine eyes.

PRAXITHEA

Would mine might shut ere thine upon the sun.

CHTHONIA

For me thou prayest unkindly; change that prayer.

PRAXITHEA

Not well for me thou sayest, and ill for thee.

CHTHONIA

Nay, for me well, if thou shalt live, not I.

PRAXITHEA

How live, and lose these loving looks of thine?

CHTHONIA

It seems I too, thus praying, then, love thee not.

PRAXITHEA

Lov'st thou not life? what wouldst thou do to die?

CHTHONIA

Well, but not more than all things, love I life.

## PRAXITHEA

And fain wouldest keep it as thine age allows?

## CHTHONIA

Fain would I live, and fain not fear to die.

## PRAXITHEA

That I might bid thee die not ! Peace ; no more.

## CHORUS

A godlike race of grief the Gods have set  
For these to run matched equal, heart with heart.

## PRAXITHEA

Child of the chief of Gods, and maiden crowned,  
Queen of these towers and fostress of their king,  
Pallas, and thou my father's holiest head,  
A living well of life nor stanch'd nor stained,  
O God Cephisus, thee too charge I next,  
Be to me judge and witness ; nor thine ear  
Shall now my tongue invoke not, thou to me  
Most hateful of things holy, mournfullest  
Of all old sacred streams that wash the world,  
Ilissus, on whose marge at flowery play  
A whirlwind-footed bridegroom found my child  
And rapt her northward where mine elder-born  
Keeps now the Thracian bride-bed of a God  
Intolerable to seamen, but this land  
Finds him in hope for her sake favourable,  
A gracious son by wedlock ; hear me then  
Thou likewise, if with no faint heart or false  
The word I say be said, the gift be given,  
Which might I choose I had rather die than give  
Or speak and die not. Ere thy limbs were made

Or thine eyes lightened, strife, thou knowest, my child,

'Twixt God and God had risen, which heavenlier name

Should here stand hallowed, whose more liberal grace  
Should win this city's worship, and our land

To which of these do reverence ; first the lord

Whose wheels make lightnings of the foam-flowered sea

Here on this rock, whose height brow-bound with dawn

Is head and heart of Athens, one sheer blow  
Struck, and beneath the triple wound that shook  
The stony sinews and stark roots of the earth  
Sprang toward the sun a sharp salt fount, and sank  
Where lying it lights the heart up of the hill,  
A well of bright strange brine ; but she that reared  
Thy father with her same chaste fostering hand  
Set for a sign against it in our guard  
The holy bloom of the olive, whose hoar leaf  
High in the shadowy shrine of Pandrosus  
Hath honour of us all ; and of this strife  
The twelve most high Gods judging with one mouth  
Acclaimed her victress ; wroth whereat, as wronged  
That she should hold from him such prize and place,  
The strong king of the tempest-rifted sea  
Loosed reinless on the low Thriasian plain  
The thunders of his chariots, swallowing stunned  
Earth, beasts, and men, the whole blind foundering world  
That was the sun's at morning, and ere noon  
Death's ; nor this only prey fulfilled his mind ;  
For with strange crook-toothed prows of Carian folk  
Who snatch a sanguine life out of the sea,

Thieves keen to pluck their bloody fruit of spoil  
From the grey fruitless waters, has their God  
Furrowed our shores to waste them, as the fields  
Were landward harried from the north with swords  
Aonian, sickles of man-slaughtering edge  
Ground for no hopeful harvest of live grain  
Against us in Bœotia ; these being spent,  
Now this third time his wind of wrath has blown  
Right on this people a mightier wave of war,  
Three times more huge a ruin ; such its ridge  
Foam-rimmed and hollow like the womb of heaven,  
But black for shining, and with death for life  
Big now to birth and ripe with child, full-blown  
With fear and fruit of havoc, takes the sun  
Out of our eyes, darkening the day, and blinds  
The fair sky's face unseasonably with change,  
A cloud in one and billow of battle, a surge  
High reared as heaven with monstrous surf of spears  
That shake on us their shadow, till men's heads  
Bend, and their hearts even with its forward wind  
Wither, so blasts all seed in them of hope  
Its breath and blight of presage ; yea, even now  
The winter of this wind out of the deeps  
Makes cold our trust in comfort of the Gods  
And blind our eye toward outlook ; yet not here,  
Here never shall the Thracian plant on high  
For ours his father's symbol, nor with wreaths  
A strange folk wreath it upright set and crowned  
Here where our natural people born behold  
The golden Gorgon of the shield's defence  
That screens their flowering olive, nor strange Gods  
Be graced, and Pallas here have praise no more.  
And if this be not I must give my child,  
Thee, mine own very blood and spirit of mine,

Thee to be slain. Turn from me, turn thine eyes  
A little from me ; I can bear not yet  
To see if still they smile on mine or no,  
If fear make faint the light in them, or faith  
Fix them as stars of safety. Need have we,  
Sore need of stars that set not in mid storm,  
Lights that outlast the lightnings ; yet my heart  
Endures not to make proof of thine or these,  
Not yet to know thee whom I made, and bare  
What manner of woman ; had I borne thee man,  
I had made no question of thine eyes or heart,  
Nor spared to read the scriptures in them writ,  
Wert thou my son ; yet couldst thou then but die  
Fallen in sheer fight by chance and charge of spears  
And have no more of memory, fill no tomb  
More famous than thy fellows in fair field,  
Where many share the grave, many the praise ;  
But one crown shall one only girl my child  
Wear, dead for this dear city, and give back life  
To him that gave her and to me that bare,  
And save two sisters living ; and all this,  
Is this not all good ? I shall give thee, child,  
Thee but by fleshly nature mine, to bleed  
For dear land's love ; but if the city fall  
What part is left me in my children then ?  
But if it stand and thou for it lie dead,  
Then hast thou in it a better part than we,  
A holier portion than we all ; for each  
Hath but the length of his own life to live,  
And this most glorious mother-land on earth  
To worship till that life have end ; but thine  
Hath end no more than hers ; thou, dead, shalt live  
Till Athens live not ; for the days and nights  
Given of thy bare brief dark dividual life,

Shall she give thee half all her agelong own  
And all its glory ; for thou givest her these ;  
But with one hand she takes and gives again  
More than I gave or she requires of thee.  
Come therefore, I will make thee fit for death,  
I that could give thee, dear, no gift at birth  
Save of light life that breathes and bleeds, even I  
Will help thee to this better gift than mine  
And lead thee by this little living hand  
That death shall make so strong, to that great end  
Whence it shall lighten like a God's, and strike  
Dead the strong heart of battle that would break  
Athens ; but ye, pray for this land, old men,  
That it may bring forth never child on earth  
To love it less, for none may more, than we.

## CHORUS

Out of the north wind grief came forth, [Str. 1.  
And the shining of a sword out of the sea.  
Yea, of old the first-blown blast blew the prelude  
of this last,  
The blast of his trumpet upon Rhodope.  
Out of the north skies full of his cloud,  
With the clamour of his storms as of a crowd  
At the wheels of a great king crying aloud,  
At the axle of a strong king's car  
That has girded on the girdle of war—  
With hands that lightened the skies in sunder  
And feet whose fall was followed of thunder,  
A God, a great God strange of name,  
With horse-yoke fleeter-hoofed than flame,  
To the mountain bed of a maiden came,  
Oreithyia, the bride mismated,

Wofully wed in a snow-strewn bed  
 With a bridegroom that kisses the bride's mouth  
     dead ;  
 Without garland, without glory, without song,  
 As a fawn by night on the hills belated,  
 Given over for a spoil unto the strong.  
 From lips how pale so keen a wail

[Ant. 1.]

At the grasp of a God's hand on her she gave,  
 When his breath that darkens air made a havoc  
     of her hair,

It rang from the mountain even to the wave ;  
 Rang with a cry, *Woe's me, woe is me !*  
 From the darkness upon Hæmus to the sea :  
 And with hands that clung to her new lord's knee,  
 As a virgin overborne with shame,  
 She besought him by her spouseless fame,  
 By the blameless breasts of a maid unmarried,  
 And locks unmaidenly rent and harried,  
     And all her flower of body, born  
     To match the maidenhood of morn,  
 With the might of the wind's wrath wrenched and  
     torn.

Vain, all vain as a dead man's vision  
 Falling by night in his old friends' sight,  
 To be scattered with slumber and slain ere light ;  
 Such a breath of such a bridegroom in that hour  
 Of her prayers made mock, of her fears derision,  
     And a ravage of her youth as of a flower.

With a leap of his limbs as a lion's, a cry from his  
     lips as of thunder,

[Str. 2.]

In a storm of amorous godhead filled with fire,  
 From the height of the heaven that was rent with  
     the roar of his coming in sunder,  
 Sprang the strong God on the spoil of his desire.

And the pines of the hills were as green reeds  
shattered,  
And their branches as buds of the soft spring  
scattered,  
And the west wind and east, and the sound of the  
south,  
Fell dumb at the blast of the north wind's mouth,  
At the cry of his coming out of heaven.  
And the wild beasts quailed in the rifts and hollows  
Where hound nor clarion of huntsman follows,  
And the depths of the sea were aghast, and  
whitened,  
And the crowns of their waves were as flame that  
lightened,  
And the heart of the floods thereof was riven.  
But she knew not him coming for terror, she felt not  
her wrong that he wrought her, [Ant. 2.  
When her locks as leaves were shed before his  
breath,  
And she heard not for terror his prayer, though the  
cry was a God's that besought her,  
Blown from lips that strew the world-wide seas  
with death.  
For the heart was molten within her to hear,  
And her knees beneath her were loosened for  
fear,  
And her blood fast bound as a frost-bound water,  
And the soft new bloom of the green earth's  
daughter  
Wind-wasted as blossom of a tree ;  
As the wild God rapt her from earth's breast  
lifted,  
On the strength of the stream of his dark breath  
drifted,

From the bosom of earth as a bride from the mother,  
 With storm for bridesman and wreck for brother,  
 As a cloud that he sheds upon the sea.

Of this hoary-headed woe [Epode.

Song made memory long ago ;

Now a younger grief to mourn

Needs a new song younger born.

Who shall teach our tongues to reach

What strange height of saddest speech,

For the new bride's sake that is given to be

A stay to fetter the foot of the sea,

Lest it quite spurn down and trample the town,

Ere the violets be dead that were plucked for its crown,

Or its olive-leaf whiten and wither ?

Who shall say of the wind's way

That he journeyed yesterday,

Or the track of the storm that shall sound tomorrow,

If the new be more than the grey-grown sorrow ?

For the wind of the green first season was keen,

And the blast shall be sharper than blew between

That the breath of the sea blows hither.

#### HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Old men, grey borderers on the march of death,  
 Tongue-fighters, tough of talk and sinewy speech,  
 Else nerveless, from no crew of such faint folk  
 Whose tongues are stouter than their hands come I  
 To bid not you to battle ; let them strike  
 Whose swords are sharper than your keen-tongued  
 wail,

And ye, sit fast and sorrow ; but what man  
Of all this land-folk and earth-labouring herd  
For heart or hand seems foremost, him I call  
If heart be his to hearken, him bid forth  
To try if one be in the sun's sight born  
Of all that grope and grovel on dry ground  
That may join hands in battle-grip for death  
With them whose seed and strength is of the sea.

## CHORUS

Know thou this much for all thy loud blast blown,  
We lack not hands to speak with, swords to plead,  
For proof of peril, not of boisterous breath,  
Sea-wind and storm of barren mouths that foam  
And rough rock's edge of menace ; and short space  
May lesson thy large ignorance and inform  
This insolence with knowledge if there live  
Men earth-begotten of no tenderer thews  
Than knit the great joints of the grim sea's brood  
With hasps of steel together ; heaven to help,  
One man shall break, even on their own flood's verge,  
That iron bulk of battle ; but thine eye  
That sees it now swell higher than sand or shore  
Haply shall see not when thine host shall shrink

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Not haply, nay, but surely, shall not thine.

## CHORUS

That lot shall no God give who fights for thee.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Shall Gods bear bit and bridle, fcol, of men ?

## CHORUS

Nor them forbid we nor shalt thou constrain.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Yet say'st thou none shall make the good lot mine ?

## CHORUS

Of thy side none, nor moved for fear of thee.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Gods hast thou then to baffle Gods of ours ?

## CHORUS

Nor thine nor mine, but equal-souled are they.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Toward good and ill, then, equal-eyed of soul ?

## CHORUS

Nay, but swift-eyed to note where ill thoughts breed.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Thy shaft word-feathered flies yet far of me.

## CHORUS

Pride knows not, wounded, till the heart be cleft.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

No shaft wounds deep whose wing is plumed with words.

## CHORUS

Lay that to heart, and bid thy tongue learn grace.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Grace shall thine own crave soon too late of mine.

## CHORUS

Boast thou till then, but I wage words no more.

## ERECHTHEUS

Man, what shrill wind cf speech and wrangling air  
Blows in our ears a summons from thy lips  
Winged with what message, or what gift or grace  
Requiring ? none but what his hand may take  
Here may the foe think hence to reap, nor this  
Except some doom from Godward yield it him.

## HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

King of this land-folk, by my mouth to thee  
Thus saith the son of him that shakes thine earth,  
Eumolpus ; now the stakes of war are set,  
For land or sea to win by throw and wear ;  
Choose therefore or to quit thy side and give  
The palm unfought for to his bloodless hand,  
Or by that father's sceptre, and the foot  
Whose tramp far off makes tremble for pure fear  
Thy soul-struck mother, piercing like a sword  
The immortal womb that bare thee ; by the waves  
That no man bridles and that bound thy world,  
And by the winds and storms of all the sea,  
He swears to raze from eyeshot of the sun  
This city named not of his father's name,  
And wash to deathward down one flood of doom  
This whole fresh brood of earth yeaned naturally,  
Green yet and faint in its first blade, unblown  
With yellow hope of harvest ; so do thou,

Seeing whom thy time is come to meet, for fear  
Yield, or gird up thy force to fight and die.

## ERECHTHEUS

To fight then be it ; for if to die or live,  
No man but only a God knows this much yet  
Seeing us fare forth, who bear but in our hands  
The weapons not the fortunes of our fight ;  
For these now rest as lots that yet undrawn  
Lie in the lap of the unknown hour ; but this  
I know, not thou, whose hollow mouth of storm  
Is but a warlike wind, a sharp salt breath  
That bites and wounds not ; death nor life of mine  
Shall give to death or lordship of strange kings  
The soul of this live city, nor their heel  
Bruise her dear brow discrowned, nor snaffle or goad  
Wound her free mouth or stain her sanguine side  
Yet masterless of man ; so bid thy lord  
Learn ere he weep to learn it, and too late  
Gnash teeth that could not fasten on her flesh,  
And foam his life out in dark froth of blood  
Vain as a wind's waif of the loud-mouthed sea  
Torn from the wave's edge whitening. Tell him this ;  
Though thrice his might were mustered for our  
scathe  
And thicker set with fence of thorn-edged spears  
Than sands are whirled about the wintering beach  
When storms have swoln the rivers, and their blasts  
Have breached the broad sea-banks with stress of  
sea,  
That waves of inland and the main make war  
As men that mix and grapple ; though his ranks  
Were more to number than all wildwood leaves  
The wind waves on the hills of all the world,

Yet should the heart not faint, the head not fall,  
 The breath not fail of Athens. Say, the Gods  
 From lips that have no more on earth to say  
 Have told thee this the last good news or ill  
 That I shall speak in sight of earth and sun  
 Or he shall hear and see them : for the next  
 That ear of his from tongue of mine may take  
 Must be the first word spoken underground  
 From dead to dead in darkness. Hence ; make  
 haste,

Lest war's fleet foot be swifter than thy tongue  
 And I that part not to return again  
 On him that comes not to depart away  
 Be fallen before thee ; for the time is full,  
 And with such mortal hope as knows not fear  
 I go this high last way to the end of all.

## CHORUS

Who shall put a bridle in the mourner's lips to chasten  
 them,

[Str. 1.]

Or seal up the fountains of his tears for shame ?

Song nor prayer nor prophecy shall slacken tears nor  
 hasten them,

Till grief be within him as a burnt-out flame ;

Till the passion be broken in his breast

And the might thereof molten into rest,

And the rain of eyes that weep be dry,

And the breath be stilled of lips that sigh.

Death at last for all men is a harbour ; yet they flee  
 from it,

[Ant. 1.]

Set sails to the storm-wind and again to sea ;

Yet for all their labour no whit further shall they be  
 from it,

Nor longer but wearier shall their life's work be.

And with anguish of travail until night  
 Shall they steer into shipwreck out of sight,  
 And with oars that break and shrouds that strain  
 Shall they drive whence no ship steers again.

Bitter and strange is the word of the God most high,

[Str. 2.]

And steep the strait of his way.

Through a pass rock-rimmed and narrow the light  
 that gleams

On the faces of men falls faint as the dawn of dreams,  
 The dayspring of death as a star in an under sky

Where night is the dead men's day.

As darkness and storm is his will that on earth is  
 done,

[Ant. 2.]

As a cloud is the face of his strength.

King of kings, holiest of holies, and mightiest of  
 might,

Lord of the lords of thine heaven that are humble in  
 thy sight,

Hast thou set not an end for the path of the fires of  
 the sun,

To appoint him a rest at length?

Hast thou told not by measure the waves of the  
 waste wide sea,

[Str. 3.]

And the ways of the wind their master and thrall to  
 thee?

Hast thou filled not the furrows with fruit for  
 the world's increase?

Has thine ear not heard from of old or thine eye not  
 read

The thought and the deed of us living, the doom of  
 us dead?

Hast thou made not war upon earth, and again  
 made peace?

Therefore, O father, that seest us whose lives are a breath,

[*Ant.* 3.]

Take off us thy burden, and give us not wholly to death.

For lovely is life, and the law wherein all things live,

And gracious the season of each, and the hour of its kind,

And precious the seed of his life in a wise man's mind ;

But all save life for his life will a base man give.

But a life that is given for the life of the whole live land,

[*Str.* 4.]

From a heart unspotted a gift of a spotless hand,  
Of pure will perfect and free, for the land's life's sake,  
What man shall fear not to put forth his hand and take ?

For the fruit of a sweet life plucked in its pure green prime

[*Ant.* 4.]

On his hand who plucks is as blood, on his soul as crime.

With cursing ye buy not blessing, nor peace with strife,

And the hand is hateful that chaffers with death for life.

Hast thou heard, O my heart, and endurest [*Str.* 5.]

The word that is said,

What a garland by sentence found surest

Is wrought for what head ?

With what blossomless flowerage of sea-foam and blood-coloured foliage inwound

It shall crown as a heifer's for slaughter the forehead for marriage uncrowned ?

How the veils and the wreaths that should  
cover

[Ant. 5.]

The brows of the bride

Shall be shed by the breath of what lover

And scattered aside ?

With a blast of the mouth of what bridegroom the  
crowns shall be cast from her hair,

And her head by what altar made humble be left of  
them naked and bare ?

At a shrine unbeloved of a God un beholden a gift  
shall be given for the land,

[Str. 6.]

That its ramparts though shaken with clamour and  
horror of manifold waters may stand :

That the crests of its citadels crowned and its turrets  
that thrust up their heads to the sun

May behold him unblinded with darkness of waves  
overmastering their bulwarks begun.

As a bride shall they bring her, a prey for the bride-  
groom, a flower for the couch of her lord ; [Ant. 6.]

They shall muffle her mouth that she cry not or  
curse them, and cover her eyes from the sword.

They shall fasten her lips as with bit and with bridle,  
and darken the light of her face,

That the soul of the slayer may not falter, his heart  
be not molten, his hand give not grace.

If she weep then, yet may none that hear take  
pity ;

[Str. 7.]

If she cry not, none should hearken though she  
cried.

Shall a virgin shield thine head for love, O city,  
With a virgin's blood anointed as for pride ?

Yet we held thee dear and hallowed of her favour,

[Ant. 7.]

Dear of all men hold thy people to her heart ;

Nought she loves the breath of blood, the sanguine savour,

Who hath built with us her throne and chosen her part.

Bloodless are her works, and sweet [Epode.

All the ways that feel her feet ;

From the empire of her eyes

Light takes life and darkness flies ;

From the harvest of her hands

Wealth strikes root in prosperous lands ;

Wisdom of her word is made ;

At her strength is strength afraid ;

From the beam of her bright spear

War's fleet foot goes back for fear ;

In her shrine she reared the birth

Fire-begotten on live earth ;

Glory from her helm was shed

On his olive-shadowed head ;

By no hand but his shall she

Scourge the storms back of the sea,

To no fame but his shall give

Grace, being dead, with hers to live,

And in double name divine

Half the godhead of their shrine.

But now with what word, with what woe may we meet

The timeless passage of piteous feet,

Hither that bend to the last way's end

They shall walk upon earth ?

What song be rolled for a bride black-stoled

And the mother whose hand of her hand hath hold ?

For anguish of heart is my soul's strength broken

And the tongue sealed fast that would fain have spoken,

To behold thee, O child of so bitter a birth  
That we counted so sweet,  
What way thy steps to what bride-feast tend,  
What gift he must give that shall wed thee for  
token  
If the bridegroom be goodly to greet.

## CHTHONIA

People, old men of my city, lordly wise and hoar of  
head,  
I a spouseless bride and crownless but with garlands  
of the dead  
From the fruitful light turn silent to my dark un-  
chilled bed.

## CHORUS

Wise of word was he too surely, but with deadlier  
wisdom wise,  
First who gave thee name from under earth, no breath  
from upper skies,  
When, foredoomed to this day's darkness, their first  
daylight filled thine eyes.

## PRAXITHEA

Child, my child that wast and art but death's and now  
no more of mine,  
Half my heart is cloven with anguish by the sword  
made sharp for thine,  
Half exalts its wing for triumph, that I bare thee  
thus divine.

## CHTHONIA

Though for me the sword's edge thirst that sets no  
point against thy breast,  
Mother, O my mother, where I drank of life and fell  
on rest.  
Thine, not mine, is all the grief that marks this hour  
accurst and blest.

## CHORUS

Sweet thy sleep and sweet the bosom was that gave  
thee sleep and birth ;  
Harder now the breast, and girded with no marriage-  
band for girth,  
Where thine head shall sleep, the namechild of the  
lords of under earth.

## PRAXITHEA

Dark the name and dark the gifts they gave thee,  
child, in childbirth were,  
Sprung from him that rent the womb of earth, a  
bitter seed to bear,  
Born with groanings of the ground that gave him  
way toward heaven's dear air.

## CHTHONIA

Day to day makes answer, first to last, and life to  
death ; but I,  
Born for death's sake, die for life's sake, if indeed this  
be to die,  
This my doom that seals me deathless till the springs  
of time run dry.

## CHORUS

Children shalt thou bear to memory, that to man  
 shalt bring forth none ;  
 Yea, the lordliest that lift eyes and hearts and songs  
 to meet the sun,  
 Names to fire men's ears like music till the round  
 world's race be run.

## PRAXITHEA

I thy mother, named of Gods that wreak revenge and  
 brand with blame,  
 Now for thy love shall be loved as thou, and famous  
 with thy fame,  
 While this city's name on earth shall be for earth her  
 mightiest name.

## CHTHONIA

That I may give this poor girl's blood of mine  
 Scarce yet sun-warmed with summer, this thin life  
 Still green with flowerless growth of seedling days,  
 To build again my city ; that no drop  
 Fallen of these innocent veins on the cold ground  
 But shall help knit the joints of her firm walls  
 To knead the stones together, and make sure  
 The band about her maiden girdlestead  
 Once fastened, and of all men's violent hands  
 Inviolable for ever ; these to me  
 Were no such gifts as crave no thanksgiving,  
 If with one blow dividing the sheer life  
 I might make end, and one pang wind up all  
 And seal mine eyes from sorrow ; for such end  
 The Gods give none they love not ; but my heart,  
 That leaps up lightened of all sloth or fear

To take the sword's point, yet with one thought's  
load

Flags, and falls back, broken of wing, that halts  
Maimed in mid flight for thy sake and borne down,  
Mother, that in the places where I played  
An arm's length from thy bosom and no more  
Shalt find me never, nor thine eye wax glad  
To mix with mine its eyesight and for love  
Laugh without word, filled with sweet light, and speak  
Divine dumb things of the inward spirit and heart,  
Moved silently ; nor hand or lip again  
Touch hand or lip of either, but for mine  
Shall thine meet only shadows of swift night,  
Dreams and dead thoughts of dead things ; and the  
bed

Thou strewedst, a sterile place for all time, strewn  
For my sleep only, with its void sad sheets  
Shall vex thee, and the unfruitful coverlid  
For empty days reproach me dead, that leave  
No profit of my body, but am gone  
As one not worth being born to bear no seed,  
A sapless stock and branchless ; yet thy womb  
Shall want not honour of me, that brought forth  
For all this people freedom, and for earth  
From the unborn city born out of my blood  
To light the face of all men evermore  
Glory ; but lay thou this to thy great heart  
Whereunder in the dark of birth conceived  
Mine unlit life lay girdled with the zone  
That bound thy bridal bosom ; set this thought  
Against all edge of evil as a sword  
To beat back sorrow, that for all the world  
Thou brought'st me forth a saviour, who shall save  
Athens ; for none but I from none but thee

Shall take this death for garland ; and the men  
 Mine unknown children of unsounded years,  
 My sons unrisen shall rise up at thine hand,  
 Sown of thy seed to bring forth seed to thee,  
 And call thee most of all most fruitful found  
 Blessed ; but me too for my barren womb  
 More than my sisters for their children born  
 Shall these give honour, yea in scorn's own place  
 Shall men set love and bring for mockery praise  
 And thanks for curses ; for the dry wild vine  
 Scoffed at and cursed of all men that was I  
 Shall shed them wine to make the world's heart  
 warm,

That all eyes seeing may lighten, and all ears  
 Hear and be kindled ; such a draught to drink  
 Shall be the blood that bids this dust bring forth,  
 The chaliced life here spilt on this mine earth,  
 Mine, my great father's mother ; whom I pray  
 Take me now gently, tenderly take home,  
 And softly lay in his my cold chaste hand  
 Who is called of men by my name, being of Gods  
 Charged only and chosen to bring men under earth,  
 And now must lead and stay me with his staff  
 A silent soul led of a silent God,  
 Toward sightless things led sightless ; and on earth  
 I see now but the shadow of mine end,  
 And this last light of all for me in heaven.

## PRAXITHEA

Farewell I bid thee ; so bid thou not me,  
 Lest the Gods hear and mock us ; yet on these  
 I lay the weight not of this grief, nor cast  
 Ill words for ill deeds back ; for if one say

They have done men wrong, what hurt have they to  
hear,  
Or he what help to have said it? surely, child,  
If one among men born might say it and live  
Blameless, none more than I may, who being vexed  
Hold yet my peace; for now through tears enough  
Mine eyes have seen the sun that from this day  
Thine shall see never more; and in the night  
Enough has blown of evil, and mine ears  
With wail enough the winds have filled, and brought  
Too much of cloud from over the sharp sea  
To mar for me the morning; such a blast  
Rent from these wide void arms and helpless breast  
Long since one graft of me disbranched, and bore  
Beyond the wild ways of the unwandered world  
And loud wastes of the thunder-throated sea,  
Springs of the night and openings of the heaven,  
The old garden of the Sun; whence never more  
From west or east shall winds bring back that blow  
From folds of opening heaven or founts of night  
The flower of mine once ravished, born my child  
To bear strange children; nor on wings of theirs  
Shall comfort come back to me, nor their sire  
Breathe help upon my peril, nor his strength  
Raise up my weakness; but of Gods and men  
I drift unsteered on ruin, and the wave  
Darkens my head with imminent height, and hangs  
Dumb, filled too full with thunder that shall leave  
These ears death-deafened when the tide finds tongue  
And all its wrath bears on them; thee, O child.  
I help not, nor am holpen; fain, ah fain,  
More than was ever mother born of man,  
Were I to help thee; fain beyond all prayer,  
Beyond all thought fain to redeem thee, torn

More timeless from me sorrowing than the dream  
That was thy sister ; so shalt thou be too,  
Thou but a vision, shadow-shaped of sleep,  
By grief made out of nothing ; now but once  
I touch, but once more hold thee, one more kiss  
This last time and none other ever more  
Leave on thy lips and leave them. Go ; thou wast  
My heart, my heart's blood, life-blood of my life,  
My child, my nursling : now this breast once thine  
Shall rear again no children ; never now  
Shall any mortal blossom born like thee  
Lie there, nor ever with small silent mouth  
Draw the sweet springs dry for an hour that feed  
The blind blithe life that knows not ; never head  
Rest here to make these cold veins warm, nor eye  
Laugh itself open with the lips that reach  
Lovingly toward a fount more loving ; these  
Death makes as all good lesser things now dead,  
And all the latter hopes that flowered from these  
And fall as these fell fruitless ; no joy more  
Shall man take of thy maidenhood, no tongue  
Praise it ; no good shall eyes get more of thee  
That lightened for thy love's sake. Now, take note,  
Give ear, O all ye people, that my word  
May pierce your hearts through, and the stroke that  
cleaves  
Be fruitful to them ; so shall all that hear  
Grow great at heart with child of thought most high  
And bring forth seed in season ; this my child,  
This flower of this my body, this sweet life,  
This fair live youth I give you, to be slain,  
Spent, shed, poured out, and perish ; take my gift  
And give it death and the under Gods who crave  
So much for that they give ; for this is more.

Much more is this than all we ; for they give  
Freedom, and for a blast, an air of breath,  
A little soul that is not, they give back  
Light for all eyes, cheer for all hearts, and life  
That fills the world's width full of fame and praise  
And mightier love than children's. This they give,  
The grace to make thy country great, and wrest  
From time and death power to take hold on her  
And strength to scathe for ever ; and this gift,  
Is this no more than man's love is or mine,  
Mine and all mothers' ? nay, where that seems more,  
Where one loves life of child, wife, father, friend,  
Son, husband, mother, more than this, even there  
Are all these lives worth nothing, all loves else  
With this love slain and buried, and their tomb  
A thing for shame to spit on ; for what love  
Hath a slave left to love with ? or the heart  
Base-born and bound in bondage fast to fear,  
What should it do to love thee ? what hath he,  
The man that hath no country ? Gods nor men  
Have such to friend, yoked beast-like to base life,  
Vile, fruitless, grovelling at the foot of death,  
Landless and kinless thralls of no man's blood,  
Unchilded and unmothered, abject limbs  
That breed things abject ; but who loves on earth  
Not friend, wife, husband, father, mother, child,  
Nor loves his own life for his own land's sake,  
But only this thing most, more this than all,  
He loves all well and well of all is loved,  
And this love lives for ever. See now, friends,  
My countrymen, my brothers, with what heart  
I give you this that of your hands again  
The Gods require for Athens ; as I give  
So give ye to them what their hearts would have

## ERECHTHEUS

Who shall give back things better ; yea, and these  
 I take for me to witness, all these Gods,  
 Were their great will more grievous than it is,  
 Not one but three, for this one thin-spun thread  
 A threefold band of children would I give  
 For this land's love's sake ; for whose love to-day  
 I bid thee, child, fare deathward and farewell.

## CHORUS

O wofullest of women, yet of all  
 Happiest, thy word be hallowed ; in all time  
 Thy name shall blossom, and from strange new  
 tongues  
 High things be spoken of thee ; for such grace  
 The Gods have dealt to no man, that on none  
 Have laid so heavy sorrow. From this day  
 Live thou assured of godhead in thy blood,  
 And in thy fate no lowlier than a God  
 In all good things and evil ; such a name  
 Shall be thy child this city's, and thine own  
 Next hers that called it Athens. Go now forth  
 Blest, and grace with thee to the doors of death.

## CHTHONIA

O city, O glory of Athens, O crown of my father's  
 land, farewell.

## CHORUS

For welfare is given her of thee.

## CHTHONIA

O Goddess, be good to thy people, that in them  
 dominion and freedom may dwell.

## CHORUS

Turn from us the strengths of the sea.

## CHTHONIA

Let glory's and theirs be one name in the mouths of  
all nations made glad with the sun.

## CHORUS

For the cloud is blown back with thy breath.

## CHTHONIA

With the long last love of mine eyes I salute thee,  
O land where my days now are done.

## CHORUS

But her life shall be born of thy death.

## CHTHONIA

I put on me the darkness thy shadow, my mother, and  
symbol, O Earth, of my name.

## CHORUS

For thine was her witness from birth.

## CHTHONIA

In thy likeness I come to thee darkling, a daughter  
whose dawn and her even are the same.

## CHORUS

Be thine heart to her gracious, O Earth.

## CHTHONIA

To thine own kind be kindly, for thy son's name's  
sake.

## CHORUS

That sons unborn may praise thee and thy first-born son.

## CHTHONIA

Give me thy sleep, who give thee all my life awake.

## CHORUS

Too swift a sleep, ere half the web of day be spun.

## CHTHONIA

Death brings the shears or ever life wind up the weft.

## CHORUS

Their edge is ground and sharpened ; who shall stay his hand ?

## CHTHONIA

The woof is thin, a small short life, with no thread left.

## CHORUS

Yet hath it strength, stretched out, to shelter all the land.

## CHTHONIA

Too frail a tent for covering, and a screen too strait.

## CHORUS

Yet broad enough for buckler shall thy sweet life be.

## CHTHONIA

A little bolt to bar off battle from the gate.

## CHORUS

A wide sea-wall, that shatters the besieging sea.

## CHTHONIA

I lift up mine eyes from the skirts of the shadow, [*Str.*

From the border of death to the limits of light ;

O streams and rivers of mountain and meadow

That hallow the last of my sight,

O father that wast of my mother

Cephisus, O thou too his brother

From the bloom of whose banks as a prey

Winds harried my sister away,

O crown on the world's head lying

Too high for its waters to drown,

Take yet this one word of me dying,

O city, O crown.

Though land-wind and sea wind with mouths that  
blow slaughter [*Ant.*

Should gird them to battle against thee again,  
New-born of the blood of a maiden thy daughter,

The rage of their breath shall be vain.

For their strength shall be quenched and made  
idle,

And the foam of their mouths find a bridle,

And the height of their heads bow down

At the foot of the towers of the town.

Be blest and beloved as I love thee

Of all that shall draw from thee breath

Be thy life as the sun's is above thee ;

I go to my death.

## CHORUS

Many loves of many a mood and many a kind [*Str.* 1.

Fill the life of man, and mould the secret mind ;

Many days bring many dooms, to loose and bind ;

Sweet is each in season, good the gift it brings,  
Sweet as change of night and day with altering  
wings,  
Night that lulls world-weary day, day that comforts  
night,  
Night that fills our eyes with sleep, day that fills with  
light.

None of all is lovelier, loftier love is none, [Ant. 1.  
Less is bride's for bridegroom, mother's less for  
son,  
Child, than this that crowns and binds up all in  
one ;  
Love of thy sweet light, thy fostering breast and  
hand,  
Mother Earth, and city chosen, and natural land ;  
Hills that bring the strong streams forth, heights of  
heavenlier air,  
Fields aflower with winds and suns, woods with  
shadowing hair.

But none of the nations of men shall they liken to  
thee, [Str. 2.  
Whose children true-born and the fruit of thy body  
are we.  
The rest are thy sons but in figure, in word are thy  
seed ;  
We only the flower of thy travail, thy children indeed.  
Of thy soil hast thou fashioned our limbs, of thy  
waters their blood,  
And the life of thy springs everlasting is fount of our  
flood.  
No wind oversea blew us hither adrift on thy shore,  
None sowed us by land in thy womb that conceived  
us and bore.

But the stroke of the shaft of the sunlight that brought  
us to birth  
Pierced only and quickened thy furrows to bear us,  
O Earth.  
With the beams of his love wast thou cloven as with  
iron or fire,  
And the life in thee yearned for his life, and grew  
great with desire.  
And the hunger and thirst to be wounded and healed  
with his dart  
Made fruitful the love in thy veins and the depth of  
thine heart.  
And the showers out of heaven overflowing and liquid  
with love  
Fulfilled thee with child of his godhead as rain from  
above.  
Such desire had ye twain of each other, till molten  
in one [Ant. 2.]  
Ye might bear and beget of your bodies the fruits of  
the sun.  
And the trees in their season brought forth and were  
kindled anew  
By the warmth of the moisture of marriage, the child-  
bearing dew.  
And the firstlings were fair of the wedlock of heaven  
and of earth ;  
All countries were bounteous with blossom and  
burgeon of birth.  
Green pastures of grass for all cattle, and life-giving  
corn ;  
But here of thy bosom, here only, the man-child was  
born.  
All races but one are as aliens engrafted or  
sown,

Strange children and changelings ; but we, O our  
mother, thine own.

Thy nurslings are others, and seedlings they know not  
of whom ;

For these hast thou fostered, but us thou hast borne  
in thy womb.

Who is he of us all, O beloved, that owe thee for birth,  
Who would give not his blood for his birth's sake, O  
mother, O Earth ?

What landsman is he that was fostered and reared of  
thine hand

Who may vaunt him as we may in death though he  
died for the land ?

Well doth she therefore who gives thee in guerdon  
The bloom of the life of thy giving ; [Epode.  
And thy body was bowed by no fruitless burden,  
That bore such fruit of thee living.

For her face was not darkened for fear,  
For her eyelids conceived not a tear,  
Nor a cry from her lips craved pity ;  
But her mouth was a fountain of song,  
And her heart as a citadel strong  
That guards the heart of the city.

#### MESSENGER

High things of strong-souled men that loved their land  
On brass and stone are written, and their deeds  
On high days chanted ; but none graven or sung  
That ever set men's eyes or spirits on fire,  
Athenians, has the sun's height seen, or earth  
Heard in her depth reverberate as from heaven,  
More worth men's praise and good report of Gods  
Than here I bring for record in your ears.

For now being come to the altar, where as priest  
Death ministering should meet her, and his hand  
Seal her sweet eyes asleep, the maiden stood,  
With light in all her face as of a bride  
Smiling, or shine of festal flame by night  
Far flung from towers of triumph ; and her lips  
Trembled with pride in pleasure, that no fear  
Blanched them nor death before his time drank dry  
The blood whose bloom fulfilled them ; for her cheeks  
Lightened, and brighter than a bridal veil  
Her hair enrobed her bosom and enrolled  
From face to feet the body's whole soft length  
As with a cloud sun-saturate ; then she spake  
With maiden tongue words manlike, but her eyes  
Lit mildly like a maiden's : *Countrymen,*  
*With more goodwill and height of happier heart*  
*I give me to you than my mother bare,*  
*And go more gladly this great way to death*  
*Than young men bound to battle.* Then with face  
Turned to the shadowiest part of all the shrine  
And eyes fast set upon the further shade,  
*Take me, dear Gods ;* and as some form had shone  
From the deep hollow shadow, some God's tongue  
Answered, *I bless you that your guardian grace*  
*Gives me to guard this country, takes my blood,*  
*Your child's by name, to heal it.* Then the priest  
Set to the flower-sweet snow of her soft throat  
The sheer knife's edge that severed it, and loosed  
From the fair bondage of so spotless flesh  
So strong a spirit ; and all that girt them round  
Gazing, with souls that hung on that sad stroke,  
Groaned, and kept silence after while a man  
Might count how far the fresh blood crept, and bathed  
How deep the dark robe and the bright shrine's base

Red-rounded with a running ring that grew  
 More large and duskier as the wells that fed  
 Were drained of that pure effluence : but the queen  
 Groaned not nor spake nor wept, but as a dream  
 Floats out of eyes awakening so past forth  
 Ghost-like, a shadow of sorrow, from all sight  
 To the inner court and chamber where she sits  
 Dumb, till word reach her of this whole day's end.

## CHORUS

More hapless born by far [Str.  
 Beneath some wintrier star,  
 One sits in stone among high Lydian snows,  
 The tomb of her own woes :  
 Yet happiest was once of the daughters of Gods, and  
 divine by her sire and her lord,  
 Ere her tongue was a shaft for the hearts of her sons,  
 for the heart of her husband a sword.  
 For she, too great of mind, [Ant.  
 Grown through her good things blind,  
 With godless lips and fire of her own breath  
 Spake all her house to death ;  
 But thou, no mother unmothered, nor kindled in  
 spirit with pride of thy seed,  
 Thou hast hallowed thy child for a blameless blood-  
 offering, and ransomed thy race by thy deed.

## MESSENGER

As flower is graffed on flower, so grief on grief  
 Engrafted brings forth new blossoms of strange tears,  
 Fresh buds and green fruits of an alien pain ;  
 For now flies rumour on a dark wide wing,

Murmuring of woes more than ye knew, most like  
Hers whom ye hailed most wretched ; for the twain  
Last left of all this house that wore last night  
A threefold crown of maidens, and to-day  
Should let but one fall dead out of the wreath,  
If mad with grief we know not and sore love  
For this their sister, or with shame soul-stung  
To outlive her dead or doubt lest their lives too  
The Gods require to seal their country safe  
And bring the oracular doom to perfect end,  
Have slain themselves, and fallen at the altar-foot  
Lie by their own hands done to death ; and fear  
Shakes all the city as winds a wintering tree,  
And as dead leaves are men's hearts blown about  
And shrunken with ill thoughts, and flowerless hopes  
Parched up with presage, lest the piteous blood  
Shed of these maidens guiltless fall and fix  
On this land's forehead like a curse that cleaves  
To the unclean soul's inexpiate hunted head  
Whom his own crime tracks hotlier than a hound  
To life's veiled end unsleeping ; and this hour  
Now blackens toward the battle that must close  
All gates of hope and fear on all their hearts  
Who tremble toward its issue, knowing not yet  
If blood may buy them surety, cleanse or soil  
The helpless hands men raise and reach no stay.

## CHORUS

Ill thoughts breed fear, and fear ill words ; but these  
The Gods turn from us that have kept their law.

Let uslift up the strength of our hearts in song, [Str. 1.  
And our souls to the height of the darkling day.  
If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,

Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,  
Though the prow reel round and the helm point  
wrong,

And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way.  
For the steersman time sits hidden astern, [Ant. 1.  
With dark hand plying the rudder of doom,  
And the surf-smoke under it flies like fume  
As the blast shears off and the oar-blades  
churn

The foam of our lives that to death return,  
Blown back as they break to the gulping gloom.  
What cloud upon heaven is arisen, what shadow,  
what sound, [Str. 2.  
From the world beyond earth, from the night  
underground,

That scatters from wings un beholden the weight of  
its darkness around ?

For the sense of my spirit is broken, and blinded  
its eye, [Ant. 2.

As the soul of a sick man ready to die,  
With fear of the hour that is on me, with dread if an  
end be not nigh.

O Earth, O Gods of the land, have ye heart now to  
see and to hear [Str. 3.

What slays with terror mine eyesight and seals  
mine ear ?

O fountains of streams everlasting, are all ye not  
shrunk up and withered for fear ?

Lo, night is arisen on the noon, and her hounds  
are in quest by day, [Ant. 3.

And the world is fulfilled of the noise of them  
crying for their prey,

And the sun's self stricken in heaven, and cast out of  
his course as a blind man astray.

From east to west of the south sea-line [Str. 4.  
 Glitters the lightning of spears that shine ;  
 As a storm-cloud swoln that comes up from the skirts  
 of the sea

By the wind for helmsman to shoreward ferried,  
 So black behind them the live storm serried  
 Shakes earth with the tramp of its foot, and the  
 terror to be.

Shall the sea give death whom the land gave  
 birth ? [Ant. 4.

O Earth, fair mother, O sweet live Earth,  
 Hide us again in thy womb from the waves of it,  
 help us or hide.

As a sword is the heart of the God thy  
 brother,

But thine as the heart of a new-made mother,  
 To deliver thy sons from his ravin, and rage of his  
 tide.

O strong north wind, the pilot of cloud and rain,  
 [Str. 5.

For the gift we gave thee what gift hast thou given  
 us again ?

O God dark-winged, deep-throated, a terror to forth-  
 faring ships by night,

What bride-song is this that is blown on the blast  
 of thy breath ?

A gift but of grief to thy kinsmen, a song but of  
 death,

For the bride's folk weeping, and woe for her father,  
 who finds thee against him in fight.

Turn back from us, turn thy battle, take heed of  
 our cry ; [Ant. 5.

Let thy dread breath sound, and the waters of war  
 be dry ;

Let thy strong wrath shatter the strength of our foes,  
 men, the sword of their strength and the shield ;  
 As vapours in heaven, or as waves or the wrecks  
 of ships,

So break thou the ranks of their spears with the  
 breath of thy lips,

Till their corpses have covered and clothed as with  
 raiment the face of the sword-ploughed field.

O son of the rose-red morning, O God twin-born  
 with the day, [Str. 6.]

O wind with the young sun waking, and winged  
 for the same wide way,

Give up not the house of thy kin to the host thou  
 hast marshalled from northward for prey.

From the cold of thy cradle in Thrace, from the  
 mists of the fountains of night, [Ant. 6.]

From the bride-bed of dawn whence day leaps  
 laughing, on fire for his flight,

Come down with their doom in thine hand on the  
 ships thou hast brought up against us to fight.

For now not in word but in deed is the harvest of  
 spears begun, [Str. 7.]

And its clamour outbellows the thunder, its lightning  
 outlightens the sun.

From the springs of the morning it thunders and  
 lightens across and afar

To the wave where the moonset ends and the fall of  
 the last low star.

With a trampling of drenched red hoofs and an earth  
 quake of men that meet,

Strong war sets hand to the scythe, and the furrows  
 take fire from his feet.

Earth groans from her great rent heart, and the  
 hollows of rocks are afraid,

And the mountains are moved, and the valleys as  
waves in a storm-wind swayed.  
From the roots of the hills to the plain's dim verge  
and the dark loud shore,  
Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling  
of wheels that roar.  
As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that  
foam as they gnash  
Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of the  
poles that crash.  
The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of  
the mad steeds champ,  
Their heads flash blind through the battle, and death's  
foot rings in their tramp.  
For a fourfold host upon earth and in heaven is  
arrayed for the fight,  
Clouds ruining in thunder and armies encountering  
as clouds in the night.  
Mine ears are amazed with the terror of trumpets,  
with darkness mine eyes,  
At the sound of the sea's host charging that deafens  
the roar of the sky's.  
White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse  
against horse reels hurled,  
And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for  
the spoil of the world.  
And the meadows are cumbered with shipwreck of  
chariots that founder on land, [Ant. 7.]  
And the horsemen are broken with breach as of  
breakers, and scattered as sand.  
Through the roar and recoil of the charges that  
mingle their cries and confound,  
Like fire are the notes of the trumpets that flash  
through the darkness of sound.

As the swing of the sea churned yellow that sways  
    with the wind as it swells  
Is the lift and relapse of the wave of the chargers  
    that clash with their bells ;  
And the clang of the sharp shrill brass through the  
    burst of the wave as it shocks  
Rings clean as the clear wind's cry through the roar  
    of the surge on the rocks :  
And the heads of the steeds in their headgear of war,  
    and their corsleted breasts,  
Gleam broad as the brows of the billows that brighten  
    the storm with their crests,  
Gleam dread as their bosoms that heave to the ship-  
wrecking wind as they rise,  
Filled full of the terror and thunder of water, that  
    slays as it dies.  
So dire is the glare of their foreheads, so fearful the  
    fire of their breath,  
And the light of their eyeballs enkindled so bright  
    with the lightnings of death ;  
And the foam of their mouths as the sea's when the  
    jaws of its gulf are as graves,  
And the ridge of their necks as the wind-shaken mane  
    on the ridges of waves :  
And their fetlocks afire as they rear drip thick with a  
    dewfall of blood  
As the lips of the rearing breaker with froth of the  
    manslaying flood.  
And the whole plain reels and resounds as the fields  
    of the sea by night  
When the stroke of the wind falls darkling, and death  
    is the seafarer's light.

But thou, fair beauty of heaven, dear face of the day  
    nigh dead,

[Epode.]

What horror hath hidden thy glory, what hand hath  
muffled thine head ?

O sun, with what song shall we call thee, or ward off  
thy wrath by what name,

With what prayer shall we seek to thee, soothe with  
what incense, assuage with what gift,

If thy light be such only as lightens to deathward  
the seaman adrift

With the fire of his house for a beacon, that foemen  
have wasted with flame ?

Arise now, lift up thy light ; give ear to us, put forth  
thine hand,

Reach toward us thy torch of deliverance, a lamp for  
the night of the land.

Thine eye is the light of the living, no lamp for the  
dead ;

O, lift up the light of thine eye on the dark of our  
dread.

Who hath blinded thee ? who hath prevailed on  
thee ? who hath ensnared ?

Who hath broken thy bow, and the shafts for thy  
battle prepared ?

Have they found out a fetter to bind thee, a chain for  
thine arm that was bared ?

Be the name of thy conqueror set forth, and the might  
of thy master declared.

O God, fair God of the morning, O glory of  
day,

What ails thee to cast from thy forehead its  
garland away ?

To pluck from thy temples their chaplet enwreathed  
of the light,

And bind on the brows of thy godhead a frontlet  
of night ?

Thou hast loosened the necks of thine horses, and  
goaded their flanks with affright,  
To the race of a course that we know not on ways  
that are hid from our sight.

As a wind through the darkness the wheels of their  
chariot are whirled,

And the light of its passage is night on the face of  
the world.

And there falls from the wings of thy glory no help  
from on high,

But a shadow that smites us with fear and desire of  
thine eye.

For our hearts are as reeds that a wind on the water  
bows down and goes by,

To behold not thy comfort in heaven that hath left us  
untimely to die.

But what light is it now leaps forth on the land

Enkindling the waters and ways of the air

From thy forehead made bare,

From the gleam of thy bow-bearing hand ?

Hast thou set not thy right hand again to the string,

With the back-bowed horns bent sharp for a spring

And the barbed shaft drawn,

Till the shrill steel sing and the tense nerve ring

That pierces the heart of the dark with dawn,

O huntsman, O king,

When the flame of thy face hath twilight in chase

As a hound hath a blood-mottled fawn ?

He has glanced into golden the grey sea-strands,

And the clouds are shot through with the fires of  
his hands,

And the height of the hollow of heaven that he fills

As the heart of a strong man is quickened and  
thrills ;

High over the folds of the low-lying lands,  
On the shadowless hills

As a guard on his watchtower he stands.

All earth and all ocean, all depth and all height,  
At the flash of an eyebeam are filled with his might :  
The sea roars backward, the storm drops dumb,  
And silence as dew on the fire of the fight  
Falls kind in our ears as his face in our sight

With presage of peace to come.

Fresh hope in my heart from the ashes of dread  
Leaps clear as a flame from the pyres of the dead,

That joy out of woe

May arise as the spring out of tempest and snow,  
With the flower-feasted month in her hands rose.  
red

Borne soft as a babe from the bearing-bed.

Yet it knows not indeed if a God be friend,  
If rescue may be from the rage of the sea,

Or the wrath of its lord have end.

For the season is full now of death or of birth,

To bring forth life, or an end of all ;

And we know not if anything stand or fall

That is girdled about with the round sea's girth

As a town with its wall ;

But thou that art highest of the Gods most high,  
That art lord if we live, that art lord though we die,  
Have heed of the tongues of our terror that cry

For a grace to the children of Earth.

#### ATHENIAN HERALD

Sons of Athens, heavy-laden with the holy weight of  
years,

Be your hearts as young men's lightened of their  
loathlier load of fears ;

For the wave is sunk whose thunder shoreward shook  
the shuddering lands,  
And unbreached of warring waters Athens like a sea-  
rock stands.

## CHORUS

Well thy word has cheered us, well thy face and  
glittering eyes, that spake  
Ere thy tongue spake words of comfort: yet no  
pause behoves it make  
Till the whole good hap find utterance that the Gods  
have given at length.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

All is this, that yet the city stands unforced by  
stranger strength.

## CHORUS

Sweeter sound might no mouth utter in man's ear  
than this thy word.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Feed thy soul then full of sweetness till some bitterer  
note be heard.

## CHORUS

None, if this ring sure, can mar the music fallen from  
heaven as rain.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

If no fire of sun or star untimely sear the tender  
grain.

## CHORUS

Fresh the dewfall of thy tidings on our hopes re-  
flowering lies.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Till a joyless shower and fruitless blight them, raining from thine eyes.

## CHORUS

Bitter springs have barren issues ; these bedew grief's arid sands.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Such thank-offerings ask such altars as expect thy suppliant hands.

## CHORUS

Tears for triumph, wail for welfare, what strange godhead's shrine requires ?

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Death's or victory's be it, a funeral torch feeds all its festal fires.

## CHORUS

Like a star should burn the beacon flaming from our city's head.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Like a balefire should the flame go up that says the king is dead.

## CHORUS

Out of heaven, a wild-haired meteor, shoots this new sign, scattering fear.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Yea, the word has wings of fire that hovered, loth to burn thine ear.

## ERECHTHEUS

## CHORUS

From thy lips it leapt forth loosened on a shrill and shadowy wing.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

Long they faltered, fain to hide it deep as death that hides the king.

## CHORUS

Dead with him blind hope lies blasted by the lightning of one sword.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

On thy tongue truth wars with error ; no man's edge hath touched thy lord.

## CHORUS

False was thine then, jangling menace like a war-steed's brow-bound bell ?

## ATHENIAN HERALD

False it rang not joy nor sorrow ; but by no man's hand he fell.

## CHORUS

Vainly then good news and evil through so faint a trumpet spake.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

All too long thy soul yet labours, as who sleeping fain would wake,

Waking, fain would fall on sleep again ; the woe thou knowest not yet,

When thou knowest, shall make thy memory thirst and hunger to forget.

## CHORUS

Long my heart has hearkened, hanging on thy  
clamorous ominous cry,  
Fain yet fearful of the knowledge whence it looks to  
live or die ;  
Now to take the perfect presage of thy dark and side-  
long flight  
Comes a surer soothsayer sorrowing, sable-stoled as  
birds of night.

## PRAXITHEA

Man, what thy mother bare thee born to say  
Speak ; for no word yet wavering on thy lip  
Can wound me worse than thought forestalls or fear.

## ATHENIAN HERALD

I have no will to weave too fine or far,  
O queen, the weft of sweet with bitter speech,  
Bright words with darkling ; but the brief truth  
shown  
Shall plead my pardon for a lingering tongue,  
Loth yet to strike hope through the heart and slay.  
The sun's light still was lordly housed in heaven  
When the twain fronts of war encountering smote  
First fire out of the battle ; but not long  
Had the fresh wave of windy fight begun  
Heaving, and all the surge of swords to sway,  
When timeless night laid hold of heaven, and took  
With its great gorge the noon as in a gulf,  
Strangled ; and thicker than the shrill-winged shafts  
Flew the fleet lightnings, held in chase through heaven  
By headlong heat of thunders on their trail  
Loosed as on quest of quarry ; that our host  
Smitten with sick presage of some wrathful God

Quailed, but the foe as from one iron throat  
With one great sheer sole thousand-throated cry  
Shook earth, heart-staggered from their shout, and  
clove  
The eyeless hollow of heaven ; and breached there-  
with  
As with an onset of strength-shattering sound  
The rent vault of the roaring noon of night  
From her throned seat of usurpation rang  
Reverberate answer ; such response there pealed  
As though the tide's charge of a storming sea  
Had burst the sky's wall, and made broad a breach  
In the ambient girth and bastion flanked with stars  
Guarding the fortress of the Gods, and all  
Crashed now together on ruin ; and through that cry  
And higher above it ceasing one man's note  
Tore its way like a trumpet : *Charge, make end,*  
*Charge, halt not, strike, rend up their strength by the*  
*roots,*  
*Strike, break them, make your birthright's promise*  
*sure,*  
*Show your hearts harder than the fenced land breeds*  
*And souls breathed in you from no spirit of earth,*  
*Sons of the sea's waves ; and all ears that heard*  
Rang with that fiery cry, that the fine air  
Thereat was fired, and kindling filled the plain  
Full of that fierce and trumpet-quenching breath  
That spake the clarions silent ; no glad song  
For folk to hear that wist how dire a God  
Begat this peril to them, what strong race  
Fathered the sea-born tongue that sang them death,  
Threatening ; so raged through the red foam of fight  
Poseidon's son Eumolpus ; and the war  
Quailed round him coming, and our side bore back,

As a stream thwarted by the wind and sea  
That meet it midway mouth to mouth, and beat  
The flood back of its issue ; but the king  
Shouted against them, crying, *O Father-God,*  
*Source of the God my father, from thine hand*  
*Send me what end seems good now in thy sight,*  
*But death from mine to this man* ; and the word  
Quick on his lips yet like a blast of fire  
Blew them together ; and round its lords that met  
Paused all the reeling battle ; two main waves  
Meeting, one hurled sheer from the sea-wall back  
That shocks it sideways, one right in from sea  
Charging, that full in face takes at one blow  
That whole recoil and ruin, with less fear  
Startle men's eyes late shipwrecked ; for a breath,  
Crest fronting crest hung, wave to wave rose poised,  
Then clashed, breaker to breaker ; cloud with cloud  
In heaven, chariot with chariot closed on earth,  
One fourfold flash and thunder ; yet a breath,  
And with the king's spear through his red heart's  
root  
Driven, like a rock split from its hill-side, fell  
Hurled under his own horsehoofs dead on earth  
The sea-beast that made war on earth from sea,  
Dumb, with no shrill note left of storming song,  
Eumolpus ; and his whole host with one stroke  
Spear-stricken through its dense deep iron heart  
Fell hurtling from us, and in fierce recoil  
Drew seaward as with one wide wail of waves,  
Resorbed with reluctance ; such a groan  
Rose from the fluctuant reflux of its ranks,  
Sucked sullen back and strengthless ; but scarce yet  
The steeds had sprung and wheels had bruised their  
lord

Fallen, when from highest height of the sundering  
heaven

The Father for his brother's son's sake slain  
Sent a sheer shaft of lightning writhen and smote  
Right on his son's son's forehead, that unhelmed  
Shone like the star that shines down storm, and gave  
Light to men's eyes that saw thy lord their king  
Stand and take breath from battle ; then too soon  
Saw sink down as a sunset in sea-mist  
The high bright head that here in van of the earth  
Rose like a headland, and through storm and night  
Took all the sea's wrath on it ; and now dead  
They bring thee back by war-forsaken ways  
The strength called once thy husband, the great  
guard

That was of all men, stay of all men's lives,  
They bear him slain of no man but a God,  
Godlike ; and toward him dead the city's gates  
Fling their arms open mother-like, through him  
Saved ; and the whole clear land is purged of war  
What wilt thou say now of this weal and woe ?

## PRAXITHEA

I praise the Gods for Athens. O sweet Earth,  
Mother, what joy thy soul has of thy son,  
Thy life of my dead lord, mine own soul knows  
That knows thee godlike ; and what grief should mine,  
What sorrow should my heart have, who behold  
Thee made so heavenlike happy ? This alone  
I only of all these blessed, all thy kind,  
Crave this for blessing to me, that in theirs  
Have but a part thus bitter ; give me too  
Death, and the sight of eyes that meet not mine.  
And thee too from no godless heart or tongue

Reproachful, thee too by thy living name,  
 Father divine, merciful God, I call,  
 Spring of my life-springs, fountain of my stream,  
 Pure and poured forth to one great end with thine,  
 Sweet head sublime of triumph and these tears,  
 Cepheus, if thou seest as gladly shed  
 Thy blood in mine as thine own waves are given  
 To do this great land good, to give for love  
 The same lips drink and comfort the same hearts,  
 Do thou then, O my father, white-souled God,  
 To thy most pure earth-hallowing heart eterne  
 Take what thou gavest to be given for these,  
 Take thy child to thee ; for her time is full,  
 For all she hath borne she hath given, seen all she  
 had

Flow from her, from her eyes and breasts and hands  
 Flow forth to feed this people ; but be thou,  
 Dear God and gracious to all souls alive,  
 Good to thine own seed also ; let me sleep,  
 Father ; my sleepless darkling day is done,  
 My day of life like night, but slumberless :  
 For all my fresh fair springs, and his that ran  
 In one stream's bed with mine, are all run out  
 Into the deep of death. The Gods have saved  
 Athens ; my blood has bought her at their hand,  
 And ye sit safe ; be glorious and be glad  
 As now for all time always, countrymen,  
 And love my dead for ever ; but me, me,  
 What shall man give for these so good as death ?

## CHORUS

From the cup of my heart I pour through my lips  
 along [Str. I.  
 The mingled wine of a joyful and sorrowful song ;

Wine sweeter than honey and bitterer than blood that  
is poured

From the chalice of gold, from the point of the two-  
edged sword.

For the city redeemed should joy flow forth as a flood,  
And a dirge make moan for the city polluted with  
blood.

Great praise should the Gods have surely, my  
country, of thee,

[Ant. 1.]

Were thy brow but as white as of old for thy sons to  
see,

Were thy hands as bloodless, as blameless thy cheek  
divine ;

But a stain on it stands of the life-blood offered for  
thine.

What thanks shall we give that are mixed not and  
marred with dread

For the price that has ransomed thine own with thine  
own child's head ?

For a taint there cleaves to the people redeemed  
with blood,

[Str. 2.]

And a plague to the blood-red hand.

The rain shall not cleanse it, the dew nor the  
sacred flood

That blesses the glad live land.

In the darkness of earth beneath, in the world with-  
out sun,

[Ant. 2.]

The shadows of past things reign ;

And a cry goes up from the ghost of an ill deed done,  
And a curse for a virgin slain.

#### ATHENA

Hear, men that mourn, and woman without mate,  
Hearken ; ye sick of soul with fear, and thou

Dumb-stricken for thy children ; hear ye too,  
Earth, and the glory of heaven, and winds of the air,  
And the most holy heart of the deep sea,  
Late wrath, now full of quiet ; hear thou, sun,  
Rolled round with the upper fire of rolling heaven  
And all the stars returning ; hills and streams,  
Springs and fresh fountains, day that seest these deeds,  
Night that shalt hide not ; and thou child of mine,  
Child of a maiden, by a maid redeemed,  
Blood-guiltless, though bought back with innocent  
blood,

City mine own ; I Pallas bring thee word,  
I virgin daughter of the most high God  
Give all you charge and lay command on all  
The word I bring be wasted not ; for this  
The Gods have stablished and his soul hath sworn,  
That time nor earth nor changing sons of man  
Nor waves of generations, nor the winds  
Of ages risen and fallen that steer their tides  
Through light and dark of birth and lovelier death  
From storm toward haven inviolable, shall see  
So great a light alive beneath the sun  
As the awless eye of Athens ; all fame else  
Shall be to her fame as a shadow in sleep  
To this wide noon at waking ; men most praised  
In lands most happy for their children found  
Shall hold as highest of honours given of God  
To be but likened to the least of thine,  
Thy least of all, my city ; thine shall be  
The crown of all songs sung, of all deeds done  
Thine the full flower for all time ; in thine hand  
Shall time be like a sceptre, and thine head  
Wear worship for a garland ; nor one leaf  
Shall change or winter cast out of thy crown

Till all flowers wither in the world ; thine eyes  
Shall first in man's flash lightning liberty,  
Thy tongue shall first say freedom ; thy first hand  
Shall loose the thunder terror as a hound  
To hunt from sunset to the springs of the sun  
Kings that rose up out of the populous east  
To make their quarry of thee, and shall strew  
With multitudinous limbs of myriad herds  
The foodless pastures of the sea, and make  
With wrecks immeasurable and unsummed defeat  
One ruin of all their many-folded flocks  
Ill shepherded from Asia ; by thy side  
Shall fight thy son the north wind, and the sea  
That was thine enemy shall be sworn thy friend  
And hand be struck in hand of his and thine  
To hold faith fast for aye ; with thee, though each  
Make war on other, wind and sea shall keep  
Peace, and take truce as brethren for thy sake  
Leagued with one spirit and single-hearted strength  
To break thy foes in pieces, who shall meet  
The wind's whole soul and might of the main sea  
Full in their face of battle, and become  
A laughter to thee ; like a shower of leaves  
Shall their long galleys rank by staggering rank  
Be dashed adrift on ruin, and in thy sight  
The sea deride them, and that lord of the air  
Who took by violent hand thy child to wife  
With his loud lips bemock them, by his breath  
Swept out of sight of being ; so great a grace  
Shall this day give thee, that makes one in heart  
With mine the deep sea's godhead, and his son  
With him that was thine helmsman, king with king,  
Dead man with dead ; such only names as these  
Shalt thou call royal, take none else or less

To hold of men in honour ; but with me  
Shall these be worshipped as one God, and mix  
With mine the might of their mysterious names  
In one same shrine served singly, thence to keep  
Perpetual guard on Athens ; time and change,  
Masters and lords of all men, shall be made  
To thee that knowest no master and no lord  
Servants ; the days that lighten heaven and nights  
That darken shall be ministers of thine  
To attend upon thy glory, the great years  
As light-engraven letters of thy name  
Writ by the sun's hand on the front of the earth  
For world-beholden witness ; such a gift  
For one fair chaplet of three lives enwreathed  
To hang for ever from thy storied shrine,  
And this thy steersman fallen with tiller in hand  
To stand for ever at thy ship's helm seen,  
Shall he that bade their threefold flower be shorn  
And laid him low that planted, give thee back  
In sign of sweet land reconciled with sea  
And heavenlike earth with heaven ; such promise  
pledge  
I daughter without mother born of God  
To the most woful mother born of man  
Plight for continual comfort. Hail, and live  
Beyond all human hap of mortal doom  
Happy ; for so my sire hath sworn and I.

## PRAXITHEA

O queen Athena, from a heart made whole  
Take as thou givest us blessing ; never tear  
Shall stain for shame nor groan untune the song  
That as a bird shall spread and fold its wings  
Here in thy praise for ever, and fulfil

The whole world's crowning city crowned with thee  
As the sun's eye fulfils and crowns with sight  
The circling crown of heaven. There is no grief  
Great as the joy to be made one in will  
With him that is the heart and rule of life  
And thee, God born of God ; thy name is ours,  
And thy large grace more great than our desire.

## CHORUS

From the depth of the springs of my spirit a fountain  
is poured of thanksgiving,  
My country, my mother, for thee,  
That thy dead for their death shall have life in thy  
sight and a name everliving  
At heart of thy people to be  
In the darkness of change on the waters of time they  
shall turn from afar  
To the beam of this dawn for a beacon, the light of  
these pyres for a star.  
They shall see thee who love and take comfort, who  
hate thee shall see and take warning,  
Our mother that makest us free ;  
And the sons of thine earth shall have help of the  
Waves that made war on their morning,  
And friendship and fame of the sea.

## NOTES

v. 497-503. Cf. Eurip. Fr. *Erechtheus*, 46-49.

v. 522-530. Id. 32-40.

v. 778. Aesch. *Supp.* 524-6.

v. 983. Soph. Fr. (*Oreithyia*) 555.

ὑπέρ τε πόντον πάντ' ἐπ' ἔσχατα χθονὸς  
νυκτός τε πηγὰς οὐρανοῦ τ' ἀναπτυχας,  
Φοίβου παλαιὸν κῆπον.

v. 1163. Aesch. Fr. (*Danaides*) 38.

δμβρος δ' ἀπ' εὐνάεντος οὐρανοῦ πεσὼν  
ἔκυσε γαῖαν.

v. 1168. Id.

δενδρῶτις ὥρα δ' ἐκ νοτίζουντος γάμου  
τέλειός ἐστι.

v. 1749. 'God born of God.' Soph. *Ant.* 834. θεός τοι καὶ θεογεννης.



**PRINTED AT THE COMPLET<sup>E</sup> PRESS  
WEST NORWOOD  
LONDON**

八





GETTY CENTER LIBRARY



